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ABSTRACT

This handbook is the fruit of two projects of the University of Minnesota's College of Education: (1) the Dowling Friendship Program, a 3-year project at a public elementary school in Minneapolis in which children with and without disabilities participated in a variety of recreation activities during school, after school, at each other's homes, and at neighborhood recreation centers; and (2) a statewide survey of best practices in inclusive recreation based on responses from 484 community recreation agencies. The book proposes that recreation can be a powerful vehicle for promoting friendships between children with and without disabilities, with the word "recreation" referring to both structured as well as informal activities. In Chapter 1, children talk about friendship, parents talk about their children's friendships, and school personnel talk about their students' friendships. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on common barriers to friendship and examine what families, school staff, and community recreation staff can do to encourage friendships. Chapter 4 presents suggestions for facilitating friendship development in recreation activities. It discusses planning for friendship using focus groups, offers 10 guidelines for facilitating friendships and tips for leading small groups, and suggests how to avoid common problems. Appendixes contain a 21-item bibliography, information about the Dowling Friendship Program, interviews with the Principal and Integration Specialist of the Dowling Urban Environmental Learning Center, and indicators of quality in integrated community recreation. (JDD)

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Making Friends

Using Recreation Activities to Promote Friendship Between Children With and Without Disabilities

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Forward

At a conference sponsored by the Division of Recreation, Park, and Leisure Studies at the University of Minnesota, entitled *Best Practices in Integrated Recreation*, I was honored to be invited to give opening remarks on inclusive recreation services. "Inclusive" was the key word. In thinking about what to say, I remembered a famous speech about inclusion by a speaker far more eloquent than I. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. never used the word "inclusion," but his message and his dream were clear. He longed for a world in which people would be included. He was an advocate for the rights of all people to be included as equal participants in their communities.

So too have the authors of this handbook been civil rights advocates, albeit of a different kind. They have researched, written, and spoken about inclusion of people with and without disabilities in community life. They have longed for a world in which disability, even severe disability, does not mean less right to be included as an equal member in the community. They have understood and described "community" as more than a place. They have described community as a sense of mutual and reciprocal relationships and a sense of belonging among other human beings. They have also understood that recreation is an essential component of community. They have advocated for inclusive recreation, in which participants are of mixed abilities, rather than segregated recreation, in which participants with and without disabilities are separated. After all, if recreation is an important part of community and promotes a sense of belonging and membership, then segregated recreation, by definition, would not promote community, which itself is an inclusive concept. The authors have been standard bearers among recreation professionals, always promoting inclusive recreation and striving to help others understand their roles in promoting community inclusion.

As I reflected on the work that they have done, I remembered again the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and I began my remarks: "I have a dream! I have a dream that one day all people will be recognized as people, celebrated for who they are, and not recognized by their limitations. I have a dream that one day it will not be necessary to conduct workshops like this one because 'best practices' will be 'everyday practices' and as such, 'taken for granted.' To those of you that have been involved in integrated recreation, I challenge you to rethink what you've been doing to ensure that elements of mutuality and reciprocity pervade your services and programs. I challenge you to learn new ideas and new ways of being inclusive. But most of all, I challenge you to begin to think how you can help others to make 'best practices in integrated recreation' become every day practices... Dreams become realities because people teach others, help others, and serve as role models to their friends, families, and co-workers."

Dr. Linda Heyne, Dr. Stuart J. Schleien, and Dr. Leo McAvoy have done just that. They have taught others, helped others, and have served as role models to countless students, colleagues, friends, and families. They understand that before that dream can come true, there is much work that is needed. In particular, they understand that friendship development and maintenance is integral to a sense of belonging, and thus, to community and its opportunities for inclusive recreation. They have worked to understand friendships and to develop strategies to facilitate friendships.

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this work on friendships by

Heyne, Schleien, and McAvoy. It is the result of extensive work which has spanned their careers. It represents a very thoughtful look at friendships that recognizes the unique perspectives of children with disabilities, their parents, teachers, and school administrators. That is, it is not only about friendships from the perspectives of professionals and experts. They understand that professional services cannot meet a person's needs for friendship, which is such a vital part of belonging and being a part of a community. Rather, it is about friendships from the people about whom we are most concerned - the children with and without disabilities who are friends. If nothing else were included in the handbook, these perspectives would make it a valid contribution to the literature. By including the thoughts about friendships from children's and parents' perspectives, the handbook de-emphasizes the role of professionals and reminds us of the role of self-determination in the development of friendships and the development of inclusive communities.

But the authors did not stop with just perspectives of children with and without disabilities who are friends. The facilitation of friendships as a part of inclusive recreation and thus inclusive community must be shared among all who envision a world that is more accepting of all people. The authors understand the importance of linkages that connect families with schools and communities to facilitate integrated recreation and friendship development. As such, they have also addressed the roles and thoughts of parents, teachers, and school administrators. In addition, they have offered specific strategies to promote home-school-community connections. All of these sections make this a very thorough and usable handbook.

In this publication, the authors have provided us with information about friendships that can help to make the dream of "best practices" become "everyday practices." I challenge you to listen to the thoughts of the people who have shared their own personal experiences about friendships, which are presented here. I also challenge you to use some of the strategies suggested in this handbook as you move toward being an agent of change who facilitates mutual and reciprocal friendships that can flourish in inclusive recreation settings. Only then will our dream of inclusive community become a reality.

Charles C. Bullock, Ph.D.
Center for Recreation and Disability Studies
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all those who took part in two important efforts that led to the development of this handbook: a three-year program, called the Dowling Friendship Program, which sought to understand and encourage friendships between children with and without disabilities; and a statewide survey of 484 community recreation agencies across Minnesota to identify inclusive recreation strategies for individuals with disabilities.

First, our gratitude is extended to the families who participated in the Dowling Friendship Program. Our lives are richer for having known them and seen the world through their eyes. We thank them for their willingness to be pioneers in this effort and for sharing their thoughts and unique perspectives.

We also wish to thank the entire "community" - staff, students, and parents - at Dowling Urban Environmental Learning Center, a Minneapolis public school, for their participation in the Dowling Friendship Program. Three individuals from Dowling School deserve a special word of thanks. Dr. Jeffrey Raison, Principal, has provided the project with vision, support, humor, and ongoing continuity. Ms. Micky Pearson, Integration Specialist, has spent countless hours as school liaison for the project. Her untiring dedication, wealth of experience, and words of wisdom have been vital to the shaping of the program. We are also indebted to Ms. Mary Jo Opgaard, Community Education Coordinator, for her cheerful, competent assistance in including children with mixed abilities in after-school programs.

The perspectives, experiences, and recommendations described in this handbook could not have been gathered and formulated without the creativity, sensitivity, ardor, and perseverance of graduate students from the University of Minnesota's Therapeutic Recreation Grant Project. Community recreation agencies and Dowling students and families will fondly remember the efforts of Ms. Kari Clark, Ms. Crystie Dufon, Ms. Becky Dvorak, Ms. Jane Ferdowsi, Ms. Pam Germ, Ms. Sharyl Kaase, Ms. Kirsten Kuhnly, Ms. Jane Uschold, and Mr. Doug Wahlstrom. Special thanks are also owed to office managers Mr. Paul Kammueller and Ms. Beth Nodland for their pleasant and skillful work preparing manuscripts, transcribing interviews, and helping with the smooth, day-to-day operation of the project.

Words alone cannot communicate the essence and importance of friendships. We consider ourselves exceedingly fortunate to have our words graced by the artistry and talent of Ms. Vicki Gaylord, Publications Coordinator at the Institute on Community Integration (UAP), University of Minnesota. Thank you, Vicki, for the masterful presentation of these pages.

If a prophet's words are heeded only in a foreign land, we are grateful Minnesota is a foreign land to North Carolina, home of our external consultant, Dr. Charles C. Bullock, Associate Professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In addition to authoring the Foreword of this handbook, we are indebted to Dr. Bullock for his prophetic guidance in the ongoing formation of our work.

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Introduction

About This Handbook

If we asked ourselves, "What is a friend?," each of us would have a very different, personal definition of friendship. If we made a list of the qualities we value in our friends, our list might include such attributes as "accepting," "supportive," "fun-loving," "a good listener," "trustworthy," "loyal," or "someone with whom I can share my secrets." Even though individual definitions of friendship may vary, most agree that the benefits of friendship are numerous and that childhood friendships serve many important functions. Children learn to negotiate the give and take of social relationships as they share affection, support, companionship, and assistance. Peer friendships encourage separation from parents and the development of a sense of autonomy. Friendships lead to healthy self-esteem, a sense of belonging to a community, the fulfillment of intimacy needs, the assurance of being valued and loved, and an overall enriched quality of life.

With recent trends to include children with disabilities into regular recreation and education settings, more and more opportunities are available for them to develop friendships with their peers without disabilities. Despite these increased opportunities, children with disabilities usually have far fewer relationships than children without disabilities, and their relationships are typically restricted to family members, other children with disabilities, and paid staff. Friendships that children with disabilities make in school are generally not reinforced through home and neighborhood connections. In short, most youngsters with disabilities do not receive the physical, practical, and emotional support necessary to nurture and sustain friendships with their nondisabled peers.

To understand the nature of friendship development between children with and without disabilities in grades K-6 and formulate strategies that support friendships in recreation settings, the University of Minnesota's College of Education recently engaged in two major projects. The first was the Dowling Friendship Program, a three-year project at the Dowling Urban Environmental Learning Center, a public elementary school in Minneapolis. In this program, children with and without disabilities participated in a variety of recreation activities during school, after school, at each other's homes, and at neighborhood recreation centers. Throughout the program, approximately 75 children, parents, and school staff were interviewed to learn their thoughts, feelings, and suggestions about

With recent trends to include children with disabilities into regular recreation and education settings, more and more opportunities are available for them to develop friendships with their peers without disabilities. Despite these increased opportunities, children with disabilities usually have far fewer relationships than children without disabilities...

building friendships between children with and without disabilities through recreation activities. The second project was the comprehensive, statewide *Best Practices in Inclusive Recreation Survey*, which sought to determine the most effective strategies that community recreation agencies were employing to include individuals with disabilities in their programs. Four hundred and eighty-four community recreation agencies in Minnesota participated in the study, including parks and recreation departments, community education departments, YMCAs, YMCA camps, and Jewish Community Centers.

This handbook is the fruit of these two projects. We have taken what we have learned from both efforts and gleaned what we feel is the most useful information to assist parents, school staff, and recreation professionals in working together to encourage friendships between children with and without disabilities. In these pages we propose that recreation can be a powerful vehicle for promoting friendships between children with and without disabilities. The word "recreation" as it is used in this publication, refers to both structured as well as informal recreation activities. That is, recreation may be structured programs that take place at schools, neighborhood recreation centers, nature centers, parks, or day care centers. These organized activities might include scouting, camping, sports, games, theater, or specialized hobbies, or classes in art, dance, or nature, to name a few. Or, recreation can be understood as informal arrangements that families make to get children together to play at each other's homes, attend each other's birthday parties, or enjoy neighborhood recreation resources together. As such, recreation is a versatile medium that can be transferred to the many environments in a child's life: home, school, a neighborhood playground, a community pool, a movie theater. While these settings differ from each other, they also resemble each other in that they all potentially provide opportunities for children to meet, interact, understand and enjoy each other, and, ultimately, to become friends.

The strategies presented in this handbook are intended to be used by recreation staff, school personnel, and parents in supporting friendships between children in grades K-6.

The strategies presented in this handbook are intended to be used by recreation staff, school personnel, and parents* in supporting friendships between children in grades K-6. Through these strategies, adults can promote positive social and cooperative interactions among children in recreation activities. Additionally, the handbook describes approaches that enable adults to collaborate with each other, coordinating their efforts to promote friendships. It is our hope that through the information presented here, those who are instrumental in shaping relationships between children with and without disabilities can work together to create the home-school-community connections necessary to encourage and sustain friendships.

*Note. In this publication, the term "parent" is used to refer to the person who fills the parental role, and who may or may not be the legal or biological mother or father. The term "family" includes any of the variety of forms families can assume. We define parents and families not so much by biological or legal relationships as by the role and function they assume in the child's life. These functions can include preserving physical health and safety, nurturing emotional growth and self-esteem, developing a system of values and beliefs, encouraging shared responsibility, teaching social skills and critical thinking, and providing opportunities for recreation and relaxation.

1 What Friendships Mean for Children

Thoughts from Children, Parents, and School Personnel

Why are friendships between children with and without disabilities important? What role do recreation activities play in promoting friendships? When these and other related questions are posed to children, parents, and school personnel, their responses reveal the rich benefits children with mixed abilities derive from friendships with each other.* They tell us of the subtle, yet far-reaching, implications friendships hold for enhancing not only the lives of children, but all our lives. Additionally, through their comments we can gain insight into the roles parents, school personnel, and community recreation staff and volunteers can play in nurturing and maintaining friendships between children with varying abilities.

■ Children Talk About Friendships

In her book, *Among Friends*, Letty Cottin Pogrebin writes, "...although centuries of wisdom have yielded... scores of friendship criteria ...in the last analysis, friendship is what you say it is." In this first section of the handbook, we present what elementary school-age children, in their own words, say friendship is. Children tell us who their friends are, what they like and do not like about their friends, what surprises them, and what they learn from their friends. Through their words we can gain insights into the essential, life-giving nature of friendships, and why it is so important to encourage friendships between youngsters with and without disabilities.

❑ Children With Disabilities Talk About Their Friends Without Disabilities

- **Who is a friend? A friend is . . .**

  Someone to eat lunch with • Someone who sits down with me • Someone to play with • Someone who calls me on the telephone • Someone who is nice to me.

- **What do you like to do with your friend?**

  Play with toys • Go swimming • Have Anna at my house • Eat lunch together • Talk on the telephone • Play tag • Play in my room

* See pages 52 and 65 for details about the survey procedure used for this handbook.

Chapter 1:
What Friendships Mean

- ❑ **Children Talk About Friendships** *Page 1*
- ❑ **Parents Talk About Their Children's Friendships** *Page 4*
- ❑ **School Personnel Talk About Their Student's Friendships** *Page 13*

• Birthday parties • Brownies • Read a book • Football • Go to a park • Play with puzzles • Go to Sean's house • Fish • Sing and dance • Basketball.

- **What do you like about your friend?**

  She is nice to me • I like it when Theresa [sits] there and Amanda [sits] there, and I [sit] here [between them] • He reads books with me • I like to go to her house • [I like them] 'cause they like me • He calls me on the telephone • [I like Kristie] because she's my friend • She said she [will] take me home • He pushes me [in my wheelchair] fast.

- **Is there anything you do not like about your friend?**

  No! There is nothing I don't like! • I don't like them when they tell me what to do • When she laughs too much • I don't like it if she tells my secrets.

- **Is there anything that surprised you about your friend?**

  No, nothing • Once she brought me a piece of candy.

- **What have you learned from your friend?**

  I've learned to play some new games • I learn [to go] upstairs and downstairs at Emily's [house] • Anthony will help me on the bus • I learned to play with them.

❑ Children Without Disabilities Talk About Their Friends With Disabilities

- **Who is a friend? A friend is . . .**

  Someone to have fun with • Someone who says they like you • Someone who smiles at you • Someone who helps you • Someone who is friendly • Someone who is nice to you • Someone that you like and they like you back • Someone who says, "Hi!" • Someone who plays with you • Someone who doesn't act snotty • Someone who, like if you're in math class and you are stuck on a problem, they help you • Someone who never teases you • Someone you've known for a long time • Someone who cares about you • Someone who doesn't boss you around, who doesn't say things like, "No, no, no, you can't do that!" • Someone you get together with often, so you won't lose contact.

- **What do you like to do with your friend?**

  Play computers • Go outside and play • Play games • Do puzzles • Have lunch together • Color • Play tag • Have the boys chase us • Dress up her dog • Play house • Jump rope • Simon Says • Twister • Play in her basement • Softball • Play cards like Uno • Play in the puddles • Football

"If she's playing with some other kids, she'll invite me to play, too. She wouldn't leave me out."

- **What do you like about your friend?**

She is really nice to me • He likes to do the same things I do • I like to help her out. I help her run in the gym and stay in a circle • He shares with me • She helps me with everything • She laughs and giggles with me • He says, "You're nice. I like you!" • She acts like a true friend and isn't demanding like some kids. She doesn't say, "Give me this and give me that!" • If she's playing with some other kids, she'll invite me to play, too. She wouldn't leave me out • She doesn't lie • She's someone I can tell my secrets to • He pays attention to me • When I ask him if he'll come with me, he comes • She doesn't try and act cool • He's not too wild • He's friendly • She shares food • He's funny • I like it when she listens • She's kindly • I like it when he sings • She's fun • He behaves in class • He cooperates • He's not selfish. • We're best friends • She has a good personality • She wants to play with me a lot, and I want to play with her a lot • He helped me make houses. He helped me wash out the milk cartons • She knows my name.

- **Is there anything you do not like about your friend?**

I don't like it when she talks out of turn • She bothers me when we read sometimes. She puts her hand over my face so I can't read • I don't like it when she doesn't listen to the teacher • When he gets off key • When he gets too rowdy • Sometimes it's hard to get her [to come] in the school after recess. It makes me angry when we [need to] come in and she's running around somewhere • She shoves me sometimes • When he chooses someone else to be a friend • Well...when he kisses me.

- **Is there anything that surprised you about your friend?**

I was surprised he could talk • He didn't talk to me for the first half of the year • He's smart • I didn't know she had a disability • She never wanted to hold my hand before. Now she does • She used to go out of the line a lot. Now [she gets out of line] just a little bit • He doesn't care when he gets the teacher mad • She's always nice to everyone • He wrote his whole name by himself.

- **What have you learned from your friend?**

I learned that you can still be friends, even if someone has a disability • I learned that she can be a friend to me • People that have disabilities are nice • I've learned some new games • [I've learned] how to be Aaron's friend, how to play with him • He's not real different. Maybe he looks different, but he is just like everyone else • I used to think playing with younger kids was weird, but Jenny taught me that playing with her sisters doesn't have to be weird. It can be fun • Even if you have a disability, you are still a person, a human being. You're not an alien from Mars or something like that! • Elise can do a lot of things that Sam and I can do. She's a really nice friend • There's no law against being a friend to

"Even if you have a disability, you are still a person, a human being. You're not an alien from Mars or something like that!"

a person with a disability • You can make all sorts of friends with all sorts of people • Being different is okay • Everyone needs a friend • She is a normal kid, just like me.

❑ Summary

In this section, children with and without disabilities have candidly related their thoughts about their friendships with each other. Though both groups of children have come from different perspectives, their responses are much more alike than they are different. Both groups define friendships similarly, enjoy the same recreational activities, value respect and fair treatment in their relationships, and benefit and learn from their friends in numerous ways. Children without disabilities, in particular, have told of many ways in which their lives are enriched by children with disabilities, ways that often have been surprising to them. For example, children without disabilities have learned about the talents and abilities of their friends, discovered that they can receive the gifts of friendship back from their friends, and acquired new information about differences in people. For children with disabilities, friends have enabled them to take part in everyday, growing-up experiences that only their peers can offer them. They have experienced the joy of feeling welcome, belonging, sharing, and playing with other children. All in all, it is clear that children without disabilities grow and benefit from their relationships every bit as much as children with disabilities.

■ Parents Talk About Their Children's Friendships

Parents play a vital role in influencing their children's relationships and friendships. In this section, parents discuss why it is important that children with varying abilities make friends. They talk about their fears, concerns, and dreams regarding these friendships. Finally, they share how they have seen their children's lives enriched through the friendships they have made through recreation activities.

❑ Parents of Children With Disabilities Talk About Their Children's Friendships

- **Why is it important that your child make friends with children who do not have disabilities?**
- It is important for the same reasons it is important for any child to make friends. They need someone they can be themselves with, hang out with, share their secrets with - someone to ask how things are going, and encourage and challenge them.

- By playing and making friends with other children, Elise will learn how to act appropriately in a group. She will learn to listen to others, to wait and take her turn, and to pay attention to what is going on around her.
- When our younger child [who does not have a disability] began to make friends earlier than our older daughter, Tracy [who does have a disability], we realized Tracy had missed some important milestones in learning to get along with and relate to others. We hope that by being with nondisabled peers she can learn the give-and-take of social relationships and what it means to be and have a friend.
- It is important that my son play with nondisabled boys his age so that he can learn the same games and activities that they play. In this way, he will be able to experience what it feels like to belong to a group.
- As parents, it is important that we learn what are realistic expectations regarding friendships for our son. Should we expect the same kinds of interactions that our other [nondisabled] children enjoy with their friends? Or should we accept that Sam's friendships will be different and not pressure him - or ourselves - by expecting more than is realistic?

- **What hopes and dreams do you have for your child's friendships with children who do not have disabilities?**
- I would like my daughter to make one or two good friends in the neighborhood who will visit her at our house and invite her to their's on a regular basis.
- I want my son to know that he can have a friend. If John discovers he can have a friend at age 6, then maybe he will realize he can have friends for the rest of his life.
- I would like Tracy to have a friend so that she will learn to get outside of herself more, outside of her own needs and wants. I want her to learn to be more considerate of others.
- I want my son to be in the "right" crowd, not the "parking lot" crowd.
- Right now, my son is very dependent on adults to meet his needs. I hope, one day, he will learn to ask his friends for what he needs.
- We would like to get to know our daughter's friends and their families better so we would feel comfortable calling them on the telephone and inviting them over to our house.
- I think it is important to prepare the nondisabled children to interact with my son....we do not usually teach children that it is okay to tell John if you do not like something he did. Those boundaries are not always obvious to children. They need to be given permission to yell at John, just like they would at any kid.

Parents play a vital role in influencing their children's relationships and friendships.

- I want to learn more about supporting my daughter's friendships.

- **What are your fears or concerns about your child making friends with children who do not have disabilities?**

- I am afraid the disability itself will be a barrier to friendship. Even something as minor as having red hair - much less using a wheelchair - can keep people from wanting to get to know a person.

- I am afraid that my son will not be able to make any friends, that no other children will respond or reach out to him.

- I am concerned that Andy will not express his opinion because he is afraid of what other children might think.

- I am afraid that other children will tease my daughter.

- I fear that Susan might value a friendship so much that she will compromise herself, sacrifice her own identity. I worry that she will let others walk on her.

- I fear that my daughter will develop low self-esteem. I am afraid she might lack confidence if she compares herself to other children who are able to do more than she can do.

- I do not want my daughter to feel like she has to apologize for herself.

- **What stands in the way of your child making friends with children who do not have disabilities.**

- Parents' schedules are the biggest barriers to friendships. It is difficult to coordinate everyone's busy schedules and arrange times to get together.

- My daughter's short attention span limits her ability to interact in a genuine peer fashion.

- Communication problems can interfere with developing friendships. Children may have difficulty understanding different speech patterns, or waiting while a child thinks of what to say and tries to say it.

- The biggest barrier right now seems to be my thinking that my daughter may not be accepted by others as an equal partner. I am sure this stems from my having to defend her so often in public.

- A lack of social acceptance of children with disabilities can be a barrier to friendship development.

- There is a lot of difference between what my daughter is able to do and what most other children can do. These differences are often apparent to nondisabled children, and they stand in the way of friendships developing. Also, it is frustrating for my daughter when she cannot keep up with other children.

"The biggest barrier right now seems to be my thinking that my daughter may not be accepted by others as an equal partner. I am sure this stems from my having to defend her so often in public."

- For my son, the logistics of meeting transportation, feeding, and toileting needs can interfere with friendships.
- It is difficult to get together with other families when we live so far apart. If we have to drive, it takes an extra effort to make arrangements to meet.
- It would be very challenging for other parents to try to meet my child's behavioral needs in their homes.

- **How can recreation activities in homes and neighborhoods support your child's friendships with children who do not have disabilities?**

- In recreation activities, children with and without disabilities are more on an equal par with each other.
- At school, the differences between children with and without disabilities often mean that they are working on different sets of goals. In recreation activities, however, children can focus on the same goals - having fun, interacting, and making friends.
- I have become keenly aware of how important it is for Annie to have a "system." The supports that are offered in recreation programs - such as adapting activities, one-to-one assistance, and extra cues - give Annie the help she needs to participate successfully and enjoyably.
- It is important that children with and without disabilities be given regular opportunities to participate in recreation activities during the school day. Lunch time is an ideal time for children to get together.
- Ongoing programs throughout the school year, like Brownies or Girl Scouts, really help give the children's relationships continuity and provide multiple opportunities to spend time together.
- It is important that families get to know each other better through recreation activities. Families with children with and without disabilities can get together for informal picnics, potlucks, and barbecues at the park or at each other's homes.

- **How does your child benefit from friendships with children without disabilities?**

- My daughter's self-esteem and self-confidence have improved tremendously. She more readily states her opinion now about which activities she would like to do. She is also initiating conversations, inviting friends over, and greeting other children more appropriately than she used to do.
- My daughter has a better understanding of what it means to be a friend. She knows who her friends are and realizes that she has choices about who she plays with. She realizes that she does not have to play with just anyone.

"She is learning that there are people with whom she will feel safe, who will treat her well, and who will be nice to be around."

- She knows she has a friend, just like her younger sister. That has been a major breakthrough for her.
- His self-image has improved. He takes better care of himself.
- When children used to come to the house to play with Sam, he'd run into the other room to play a game by himself. Now he greets his friends appropriately, and plays with them for hours at a time.
- My daughter has developed a circle of friends that she really looks forward to seeing. This has given her a larger sense of the world. She is learning that there are people with whom she will feel safe, who will treat her well, and who will be nice to be around.

- **How do you think your child's friendships with children without disabilities will develop in the future?**

- Even if my child's current friendships do not last, through the friendships she has made she has learned the skills to make a friend. She will carry these skills with her, and continue to make new friends throughout her life.
- She may become lifetime friends with one or two of the kids, but that is not necessarily a dream of mine. I do not think that happens a lot in the real world - that people remain friends forever.
- If my child wants to keep the friends she has, I will do what I can to help her keep them. If she wants to make new friends, that is fine with me, too, and I will support her in making new friends.
- I believe that the friendships my child is making with nondisabled children now have the potential to last for the rest of their lives.

- **Do you have any other comments about your child's friendships?**

"Our generation did not understand people with disabilities. I would like my child to have an opportunity that I never had, which is to get to know, on a personal level, children with disabilities."

- I am surprised at how natural the interactions are between my daughter and her friends.
- As my daughter has made new friends, she has helped me understand that relationships are not to be taken for granted.
- I am surprised that parents of children without disabilities are so interested in friendships between children with mixed abilities, particularly when the benefits do not seem so great or tangible for their families.
- It has been really nice that others have taken an interest in my son's friendships. Other people becoming aware of what they can gain by being a friend to someone with a disability has contributed to the larger picture of what creates happiness. For my son, having friends has brought him a lot of happiness.

❑ Parents of Children Without Disabilities Talk About Their Children's Friendships

- **Why is it important that your child makes friends with children who have disabilities?**
- Our generation did not understand people with disabilities. I would like my child to have an opportunity that I never had, which is to get to know, on a personal level, children with disabilities.
- I would like my daughter to learn that color, race, or any degree of disability should not interfere with becoming friends.
- When I was a child, I had relatives who had disabilities. I did not understand what that meant and I was terrified. I was afraid to be around anyone who seemed different. I want Mary to have a different experience. I want her to understand disabilities and be comfortable with people who have them. I want her to be able to see the person, not the disability.
- It is important that I, as a parent, learn how to interact positively with children with special needs. If I learn this, I can model these interactions for my son so that he can learn them, too.
- I would like to become more aware of what my daughter's friend is capable of doing. If I am more familiar with her needs, I can feel comfortable inviting her to our home.

- **What hopes and dreams do you have for your child's friendships with children who have disabilities?**
- I hope that my children continue to see the value and joy in differences among their friends.
- We want our son to learn to treat all people the same - as equals.
- I would like my daughter to learn to include other children in her activities - not to be so exclusive.
- I would like Patty to form a sincere, non-forced friendship with a child with a disability.
- We hope our daughter's friendship can endure the "busy-ness" of our lives.
- I would like Joe to be more of a peer and less of a helper to Steve.
- We live just down the alley from Mark's friend. I would like to see Mark stop over to visit him on a regular basis.
- I want my children to avoid fears and stereotypical thinking about children with disabilities.
- I would like to learn what the correct terminology is when referring to people with disabilities.
- I simply want my daughter to learn how to be a friend.

"I simply want my daughter to learn how to be a friend."

- **What fears or concerns do you have about your child making friends with children with disabilities?**
- It will not be easy for me, as a parent, to accept the increased supervision inherent in supporting my son's friendship with a child with special needs.
- If we invited Tanya to my daughter's birthday party, I am uncertain about how I would handle Tanya's behaviors if she started to run around or act out.
- I am really not comfortable inviting my son's friend over to our house yet.

- **What stands in the way of your child making friends with children with disabilities?**
- Time is the biggest barrier. Everyone is busy and often unaware of each other's needs.
- Geography is a problem. Families live so far apart that it is difficult to get together very often.
- Different ability levels and different expectations can interfere with developing friendships.
- Lack of knowledge about how to meet a child's special needs can stand in the way of extending the children's friendships beyond the school and into families' homes.

- **How can recreation activities in homes and neighborhoods support your child's friendships with children who have disabilities?**
- Children can take classes together at neighborhood recreation centers.
- Families can plan to participate in activities together, such as going to the park, the zoo, the movies, the beach, or rollerskating.
- It is important to involve the children in as many activities as possible, so that they have frequent opportunities to interact with and get to know each other.
- I think lunch-time friendship groups offer children a lot. They see each other on a regular basis. They share their lunches and decide for themselves what they would like to do. They learn to carry on conversations, which is an important skill in building friendships. These kinds of regular, ongoing recreation activities contribute substantially to helping children make friends.
- Families can get to know each other better, and the needs of their children better, through recreation activities at school and in the neighborhood.

"Lack of knowledge about how to meet a child's special needs can stand in the way of extending the children's friendships beyond the school and into families' homes."

- **How does your child benefit from friendships with children with disabilities?**
- It is nice to see how comfortable Ben is with Andy. I can barely understand Andy when he talks, but Ben understands him perfectly.
- Getting to know a child with a disability has helped my daughter feel less "different" and excluded. She is Native American and does not always know how she "fits in" with others around her. Having Elise for a friend has helped her understand how we are all unique. She has developed a healthier self-esteem and a much stronger sense of her own identity.
- It made my son feel important to have a friend who had different abilities. It was a big deal to him that someone would trust him to push Sam's wheelchair.
- My daughter has made a friend who is just as important to her as any of her other friends who do not have disabilities.
- My daughter felt it was an honor to be one of Erin's friends, and to be able to be a friend to her.
- Julia has really opened up. In crowds, she used to hang back. Now she is right up front. She used to be much quieter. Now she speaks up. Helping someone else has given her a lot of self-confidence.
- I feel my son has grown a great deal personally from the experience. He has become more of a whole person. He has tapped into a part of himself that he might not have developed otherwise.
- **What do you think will happen to your child's friendships with children with disabilities in the future?**
- It is hard to predict what the future will hold. We try to teach our daughter to tell us what she wants, and then we try to support her. If she wants to continue the friendship, she will probably let us know, and we will do what we can to help the friendship along.
- I think it is okay if the friendships end. When the time comes, it is natural for some friendships to end. We cannot expect the children to keep friendships going, if they do not want to keep them.
- I think if parents support the friendships, the children will continue them naturally. Children do not always have the means on their own to continue friendships. It is the parents' responsibility to guide them.
- It is important to let the friendships be spontaneous. Just like for all children, sometimes they will have arguments and sometimes they will be best friends. However the friendships seem to be going, it is up to parents to try to understand and encourage them.
- I would like to see the friendship continue for many years to come.

"Getting to know a child with a disability has helped my daughter feel less 'different' and excluded. She is Native American and does not always know how she 'fits in' with others around her."

- **Do you have any other comments about your child's friendships?**
- I wish my son would have become acquainted with a child with a disability at an even earlier age.
- I am very pleased with how enthusiastic the children are about their friends, and how well they all get along with each other.
- We have not seen all of the fruits of these friendships yet. We will probably not see all the fruits for several years to come. In future years, many of the nondisabled children who have become friends with children with disabilities may involve themselves in work or experiences with people with disabilities. They may not know why they are choosing those experiences, but some of them will choose them because of the friendships they are developing now.

❑ Summary

In this section, parents of children with disabilities have talked about how they want the same things for their children that all parents want: to develop close friendships, grow in self-esteem, be accepted by others, and stand up for themselves. They have expressed their fears and concerns regarding friendships for their children, ranging from worries that their children will not be accepted by other children, to concerns about time constraints, communication, or transportation. Additionally, parents of children with disabilities have told of the tremendous benefits their children derive from their friendships, including increased self confidence, more assertive social interaction styles, improved self-image, and a sense of being part of a larger world. Parents of children without disabilities have expressed the desire for inclusionary opportunities for their children that they themselves never had - opportunities to learn about, interact with, accept, and become friends with children who have disabilities. They believe that their children have learned from friends with disabilities. Specifically, they have learned to accept differences, grown in self-esteem from helping others, acquired new communication skills, and developed a stronger sense of identity.

In general, both groups of parents want their children's friendships to continue, and have said they would support their children's friendships as best they could. This includes accepting the responsibility to learn about children's individual needs and how to support their children's friendships through home and neighborhood recreation activities.

"I wish my son would have become acquainted with a child with a disability at an even earlier age."

School Personnel Talk About Student's Friendships

School personnel can have a major role in the creating and nurturing of friendships between children with and without disabilities through recreation activities taking place in schools. In this section, elementary school staff provide insights about ways that schools can use recreation activities to encourage friendships between children with and without disabilities.

- **Why is it important that children with disabilities make friends with children without disabilities?**
- The greatest hopes people have for their children have to do with social interaction and relationships.
- It is important to parents that children feel good about themselves. Parents want their children to be respectful of others: the school, the community, the earth. It is important that children apply what they learn to the outside world, be motivated and challenged academically, and go on to take charge of their own behavior and be responsible for their actions.
- School goals are designed to increase the achievement of students. Achievement encompasses several areas, and students who have friends and feel good about themselves will do better in school. Friendship and self-esteem are important to the development of academic skills.
- Allowing students with and without disabilities to spend time together informally gives them opportunities for socialization and personal growth in ways that are not readily available to them during typical school activities.
- When children with varying abilities come together in well-planned, cooperative, recreational activities, unanticipated positive benefits for all of the participants result. The greatest benefits seem to be derived by the students without disabilities.

- **How do children with disabilities benefit from friendships?**
- Children with disabilities use their nondisabled peers as role models to learn socially appropriate behaviors such as turn taking, sitting and listening while others are talking, and decreasing disruptive and other inappropriate behaviors.
- Children with disabilities develop greater self-confidence and become more social and willing to interact with nondisabled peers.
- Children with disabilities are more participative in classes, as well as in social and recreation settings.

"The greatest hopes people have for their children have to do with social interaction and relationships."

- Some of the students with minor special needs reach out and feel good about being needed by someone else.

- **How do children without disabilities benefit from friendships?**

- Children without disabilities learn a great deal about how to include a child with mobility and movement difficulties into recreation activities. The nondisabled students learn to be advocates for children with disabilities, involving them in the activity and helping them to participate. The children with disabilities learn to be advocates for themselves.

- A benefit is for those regular education students who, themselves, have some minor difficulties academically or socially. Small group activities give them opportunities to have equal access to attention, take part in special activities, and experience supportive environments in which they can be successful.

- Students without disabilities become much more accepting toward students with special needs as a result of participating in recreation activities together.

- Children without disabilities have developed a noticeable awareness of students with special needs. There is a development of compassion that would not have been there without opportunities to build friendships. Had those students not had supports to relate to students with special needs, they probably would have gone on their own way - and would have been very successful because they are good students. Making friends with students with disabilities has given them opportunities to add a new dimension to their lives.

- **What stands in the way of children with and without disabilities making friends?**

"Students without disabilities become much more accepting toward students with special needs as a result of participating in recreation activities together."

- Making arrangements for children to get together outside of school takes a great deal of effort – speaking on the telephone, communicating with one another. An extreme amount of care is needed to allow someone with a disability to do "spontaneous" things, such as to get together with friends, or to meet a group at a park.

- A major barrier to friendship development is when a child has language difficulties. The communication skills of many of the children with disabilities are different from the communication skills of the nondisabled peers. Nondisabled children are accustomed to hearing their peers speak in the same way they do. When they hear a peer with a disability say something and leave out half the words, they do not understand it. They will not usually put the effort into understanding the person unless there is someone there to help facilitate that understanding.

- If the friendship only stays in the classroom, it will not last in the long run, unless some additional connections are made. It would

be great if parents would encourage home visits. Home visits really contribute to the maintenance of friendships.

- In some cases the rigid school schedule prevents children with and without disabilities from having the informal time together that is necessary to nurture relationships. Even when friendships do develop between children of varying abilities, the next year the children may be separated again in different classrooms due to academic scheduling.

- **How can recreation activities in schools support friendships between children with and without disabilities?**

- Small group recreation activities really work well for the children. There is no pressure on the children to perform. Children have a chance to talk, which they love to do. And, the small group interactions enhance everybody's self-esteem.

- Children really enjoy interacting and playing together.

- Participating in recreation activities over the lunch period or after school provides students who are in the same grade, but in different classrooms, opportunities to get together and to give friendships a chance to develop and thrive.

- Small group interactions that have occurred through recreation activities have been a highlight for the children. Students especially enjoy getting together with their friends and opportunities to talk and be heard. The small groups provide much needed opportunities for the children to learn from their peers.

❑ Summary

In this section, school personnel have observed that educational achievement encompasses more than the development of academic skills; it also encompasses the development and practice of social and relationship skills through school-based recreation activities. Educators have stated that parents believe social kinds of skills - such as being respectful of others, feeling good about oneself, and taking responsibility for one's own behavior - are as important for their children's growth as learning academics. School personnel believe that these social and relationship skills can be learned by involving children with varying abilities in social and play activities that promote cooperation and friendship.

School staff perceive many benefits for students with disabilities who develop friendships with nondisabled peers in recreational activities. The students with disabilities learn appropriate social behaviors, develop greater self-confidence and self-esteem, have opportunities to talk and be heard, and become more participatory in home, school, and community settings.

The greatest benefits from playing together and developing friendships, however, have been observed to occur for the students

"If the friendship only stays in the classroom, it will not last in the long run, unless some additional connections are made."

without disabilities. Nondisabled students learn to interact with students who have differing styles of communication and movement, they learn to advocate on behalf of students with disabilities, they grow in self-esteem, they develop friendships with students who are different from themselves, they become more understanding of differences, and their behavior becomes more appropriate. It is important that school personnel create as many opportunities as possible for students with and without disabilities to interact socially during the course of the school day.

■ Conclusion

This chapter has explored answers to the question, "Why are friends important?" from the viewpoints of children, parents, and school staff. Their words reflect the joys and rewards of friendship, the painful barriers that can prevent friendships from developing, the reality of the challenge of making friends, and hope for a world where individual differences attract rather than repel.

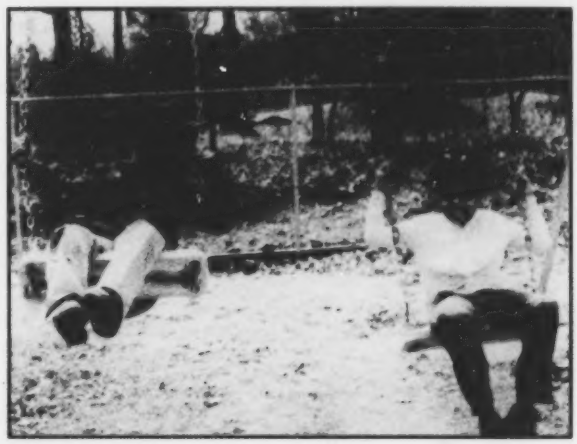
Recreation activities are an ideal setting in which to encourage friendships between children with varying abilities, whether they take place in the home, neighborhood, school, or community recreation program site. However, for many children those activities are not available or are not being conducted in a way that promotes friendships between children of varying abilities. In the following chapter we will take a closer look at why this is the case.

"You can make all sorts of friends with all sorts of people."

2 What Inhibits Friendships?

Barriers to Friendship Between Children of Mixed Abilities

While some children with and without disabilities know what it means to be friends with each other, most do not. Barriers commonly arise that inhibit children with mixed abilities from spending time together, growing close, and becoming friends. It is rare that any single obstacle by itself prevents a friendship from developing. Typically, several barriers operate simultaneously to prevent children from making friends.



■ Common Barriers

There are 11 barriers to friendship between children of mixed abilities commonly reported by parents, school personnel, and recreation leaders. Those barriers are listed here in order from those most frequently reported to the least frequently reported. It is important to note that individuals and their families differ; for example, for some the last item on the list, although seldom reported, might be more decisive than the first item in determining if friendships will or will not blossom. With these considerations in mind, we offer the following reasons why friendships between children with and without disabilities are often difficult to achieve.

❑ Families' Busy Schedules

With the day-to-day responsibilities of maintaining a household and caring for children, the time and energy needed to earn a living, and constantly competing demands on a family's time, most families lead very active lives. Friendship development between children with and without disabilities may appear to be a luxury, nonessential to family functioning. Given that there are so few examples of friendships between children with mixed abilities in today's society, parents of children with disabilities may not even think that friendships for their children are possible. Parents may hope their children will somehow make friends on their own, but this rarely occurs. And because of busy family schedules, it is difficult for parents to find time to actively seek out ways to encourage friendships.

❑ Lack of Knowledge About Recreation's Role

Parents, school staff, recreation staff, and other adults in children's lives may not be aware of the important role that recreation

Chapter 2:
What Inhibits Friendships?

❑ **Common Barriers**

Families' Busy Schedules

Lack of Knowledge About Recreation's Role

Inappropriate Social Skills

Difficult Communication

Distance Between Homes

Families Not Acquainted

Parents Do Not "Click"

Lack of Transportation

Need for Information

Lack of Common Interests

Home Has No Telephone

activities can play in providing opportunities for children with mixed abilities to meet, discover common interests, learn to interact, and develop friendships. They may not be familiar with the techniques that can be used in recreation to promote positive interactions between play partners, encourage communication and friendship behaviors, and teach the recreation skills and games of nondisabled peers. When a family enters a neighborhood recreation center, they may not know what services to request for their child with a disability. Likewise, recreation staff may not know how to meet a child's needs in a typical recreation program. Without an understanding of the value and usefulness of recreation, children with and without disabilities may miss out on many important opportunities to develop friendships.

❑ Inappropriate Social Skills

A lack of appropriate social skills can create barriers to friendship development for children with disabilities. If a child with a disability does not know how to join a group, greet other children, take turns, share materials, initiate and maintain conversations, "hang out" with other kids, or know when to speak and when to listen, he or she might stand out as "different" and an unlikely candidate to be a friend.

❑ Difficult Communication

When children with disabilities lack either the means or the skills to communicate clearly and efficiently, friendship development may be substantially limited. For example, nondisabled children may not have the patience to wait while a child with cerebral palsy attempts to verbalize a response or laboriously point to a symbol on a communication board. Nondisabled children might be intimidated by unfamiliar means of communication such as sign language, computers, or communication books. Children with disabilities might feel too awkward or embarrassed to make the effort to communicate, thereby missing opportunities to make contact with others.

Without an understanding of the value and usefulness of recreation, children with and without disabilities may miss out on many important opportunities to develop friendships.

❑ Distance Between Homes

Often, children with and without disabilities who know each other from school or other settings do not live in the same neighborhoods. When children with mixed abilities do live in the same neighborhood - that is, within about three blocks of each other - they (or their parents) can spontaneously call each other on the telephone and arrange to meet for informal play activities. However, if children live far enough from each other that driving or car pooling is required to get together, arrangements for transportation may become so complicated that opportunities for the children to recreate together may seldom occur.

❑ Families Not Acquainted

Families of children with and without may disabilities have few regular, ongoing opportunities to meet and become acquainted. Realistically, it is often up to parents to support their children's friendships. Without regular opportunities to become familiar with other parents, it is unlikely that a level of liking and trust will be developed to the degree that parents feel comfortable leaving the care of their children to others. This is especially true when a child has a particular care need, such as special feeding or toileting arrangements.

❑ Parents Do Not "Click"

Not all children who are friends need to have parents who are also friends, but having parents that like each other will increase the chances that children with and without disabilities will be given opportunities to be with each other on a regular basis. In addition to having few opportunities to become acquainted with other families, differences in family compositions, personalities, lifestyles, and socioeconomic statuses can all contribute to parents not feeling compatible enough to establish and maintain contact with other parents.

❑ Lack of Transportation

Arranging transportation is a factor in supporting friendships for all children, whether a child has a disability or not. For children with physical disabilities, however, transportation can present particular barriers to friendship development. If, for example, a family does not have a van with a lift, if public transportation is not accessible and available at convenient times, or if a wheelchair cannot fit in a personal car, children with physical disabilities may have no means to meet friends at recreation programs at school or in the community.

Families of children with and without disabilities have few regular, ongoing opportunities to meet and become acquainted.

❑ Need for Information about Disabilities

For nondisabled children to accept children with disabilities as friends, they usually need to be provided with accurate information about disabilities and given opportunities to have their questions about disabilities answered. Nondisabled children also need to be given opportunities to learn to interact, communicate, and play with children with disabilities on a regular basis. Without these efforts, stereotypes of children with disabilities might be reinforced inadvertently, and misunderstandings about expectations or abilities of children with disabilities could develop.

❑ Lack of Common Interests

At times it may be difficult to identify an activity in which both children would like to participate and for which both have the necessary abilities to participate enjoyably. Usually, however, lack of

interest in the same recreational activities is not a major barrier to friendship development because most children are open to experiencing a wide range of recreation activities. Usually a match can be found that pleases both participants.

❑ Home Has No Telephone

For a small percentage of families, not owning a telephone is a decisive obstacle to friendship development. Without a telephone, making arrangements for children or for entire families to recreate together is virtually impossible.

■ Conclusion

Awareness of the problem is the first step in any change process. The barriers to friendship development presented in this chapter hit home on a personal level. There are the practical and physical constraints of busy schedules, distance between homes, lack of transportation, and no home telephone. There are the social constraints of children's lack of communication and social skills, families not knowing each other, and parents not connecting with each other. And there are constraints associated with a lack of knowledge about the value of recreation and children who have disabilities. As personal concerns, these barriers need to be addressed on the individual and family levels.

For children with and without disabilities to build friendships with each other through recreation activities, parents, school personnel, and community recreation leaders must help the children overcome these and other barriers. While each individual situation presents unique circumstances, by learning how to address the obstacles presented here, adults will develop options and tools applicable to most situations. The following chapter presents strategies that can be used for dealing with barriers to friendship development through home, school, and community recreation activities.

...parents, school personnel, and community recreation leaders must help children overcome barriers.

3 How to Encourage Friendships

Strategies for Use in Home, School, and Community

Families, school personnel, and community recreation staff all play a role in encouraging the growth of friendships between children with and without disabilities. The following recommendations from members of all three groups address some of the ways that friendships can be promoted through recreation activities in homes, neighborhoods, schools, and community recreation programs.

■ What Families Can Do

Families can take many positive steps to influence friendship building between children with and without disabilities through recreation activities. Recognizing that friendships for their children will generally not occur by themselves, parents recommend to other families the following approaches for encouraging friendships.

❑ Make Friendship Development a Family Priority

If friendships are to develop and thrive for children, parents must make friendship development a family priority. Given the many demands on a family's time, the only way that friendships for children can be given the attention they deserve is to rank friendship development as one of the family's foremost values.

❑ Become Acquainted with Other Families

To identify neighborhood peers who can potentially be friends with their children, parents must become acquainted with other families in their neighborhoods. An ideal way to get to know other families is to meet them through school functions and at community recreation centers.

❑ Schedule Children's Times Together

If children's friendships are to grow, children need frequent and ongoing opportunities to play together and interact. Parents must play an active role in making certain these opportunities take place. For example, families can request each other's phone numbers and addresses. Also, parents can take the initiative to call other parents or teach their children to use the telephone to arrange times for friends to see each other.

Chapter 3
How to Encourage Children's Friendships

- ❑ **What Families Can Do** *Page 21*
- ❑ **What School Staff Can Do** *Page 23*
- ❑ **What Community Recreation Staff Can Do** *Page 25*

Families Can . . .

- ❑ **Make friendship development a family priority.**
- ❑ **Become acquainted with other families.**
- ❑ **Be intentional about scheduling times for children to get together.**
- ❑ **Invite children into families' homes and for community outings.**
- ❑ **Learn about the individual needs of children and how to meet them.**
- ❑ **Discuss children's friendships at home.**
- ❑ **Learn ways to encourage positive social interactions between children.**
- ❑ **Learn about community recreation resources.**

❑ Invite Children into Homes and on Outings

As children themselves have told us, an indication that classmates have become friends is that they play together outside of school. Children might stop off at a friend's house after school, be invited to a birthday party, ride bikes together on the weekend, go to a movie, or simply "hang out" together in the neighborhood. Parents can take an active role in suggesting these or similar activities to their children and in making arrangements for their friends to join them. Or, if children themselves ask to play with a friend, parents can respond by making arrangements for the activity and issuing invitations as needed.

❑ Learn About Individual Needs of Children

To feel comfortable assuming responsibility for children with special needs in their homes, parents of nondisabled children need to learn about the individual needs of friends with disabilities and how to meet them. For example, more information may be required about mobility, communication, managing inappropriate behaviors, or personal care needs. Discussing these needs with a parent of a child with a disability - or, if a parent grants permission, a school teacher - can help assuage questions and fears, and open up new opportunities for informal play between children with and without disabilities.

❑ Discuss Children's Friendships at Home

Parents can support their children's relationships by discussing them at home. Parents can talk with their children about what it means to be a friend and have one. They can ask their children questions related to a particular friend. Or they can find out if there are any classmates in school or peers in the neighborhood that their children might like to get to know better.

❑ Encourage Positive Social Interactions

To facilitate friendships between children with and without disabilities when they visit in homes, parents must learn some basic techniques to encourage positive communication and interaction between the children. Techniques developed in the area of inclusive recreation, such as arranging for cooperative play and teaching friendship skills, can be extremely valuable for parents who attempt to facilitate home play for their children.

❑ Learn About Community Recreation Resources

As a means of seeking opportunities for children with and without disabilities to share experiences, families can explore neighborhood recreation resources, such as neighborhood parks, recreation centers, nature centers, and shopping malls, as well as organized leisure programs through organizations such as YMCA/YWCAs,

scouting, and Jewish Community Centers. Children with and without disabilities might enroll in an activity class together, take part in a community event, play at a playground, or shop together. Through building a shared history of experiences in the community, the bonds of friendship can be strengthened.

■ What School Staff Can Do

Along with families, school personnel can play an important part in encouraging friendships between students with and without disabilities. Here are recommendations that have been offered for facilitating and supporting friendships through recreation activities during the school day.

❑ Include Social and Recreation Skills in Curriculum

Providing opportunities for students to learn social interaction and recreation skills along with academics can help students to gain self-confidence, learn how to get along with and respect others, build enduring relationships and friendships, assume responsibility, solve problems, and make decisions. These goals can be achieved by involving children with and without disabilities in small group, cooperative activities at regular periods throughout the school week. Within these groups children can be taught, and be given frequent opportunities to practice, such skills as greeting each other, listening to each other respectfully, taking turns, initiating and engaging in conversations, brainstorming ideas, expressing opinions, and solving problems when they arise. (See *Appendix D: An Interview with Jeffrey Raison, Principal of Dowling School*, for a discussion about how instruction in social interaction complements instruction in academics).

❑ Assign Friends to the Same Classroom

Children tend to make friends with other children who are in their same classroom. If friends who were in the same class one year are not assigned to the same class the following year, they will have fewer opportunities to spend time together and, as a result, their friendship might not continue. Teachers can pay special attention to friendships that develop between children with and without disabilities, make arrangements so those children can be in the same classrooms from year to year, and support those friendships by arranging times for children to play and work together on a regular basis.

Along with families, school personnel can play an important part in encouraging friendships between students with and without disabilities.

School Staff Can . . .

- ❑ **Infuse instruction in social interaction, cooperation, friendship, and recreation skills into the curriculum.**
- ❑ **Assign children who are friends to the same classroom.**
- ❑ **Provide opportunities for families to become acquainted.**
- ❑ **Include friendship and recreation goals in IEPs.**
- ❑ **Learn about the individual needs of children and how to meet them.**
- ❑ **Provide training on children's friendships and how to support them.**
- ❑ **Offer disability awareness training to parents and nondisabled children.**
- ❑ **Notice when friendships develop and inform parents.**

❑ Provide Opportunities for Families to Become Acquainted

If children with varying abilities are to become friends, their parents need to have opportunities to meet each other, become acquainted, and mutually support the relationships. Schools can serve as common, non-threatening bases for parents to get to know each other. Schools can provide these opportunities by sponsoring school open houses, potluck dinners, open swim or gym times, family nights, community education classes, PTA meetings, and family focus groups.

❑ Include Friendship and Recreation Goals in IEPs

Every child who receives special education services has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that is reviewed annually. Recreation has been identified in several federal laws as a "related service" that parents can request to be included on the IEP. Including recreation, friendship, or social interaction goals and objectives on an IEP will ensure that the skills related to these goals will be taught, monitored, and evaluated regularly.

❑ Train School Personnel on Children's Friendships

Teachers and other school staff, whose training may have emphasized academic skills, may need supplementary training in the importance of teaching social interaction, friendship, and recreation skills, and in techniques to support and maintain children's relationships and friendships.

❑ Offer Disability Awareness Training to Parents and Nondisabled Children

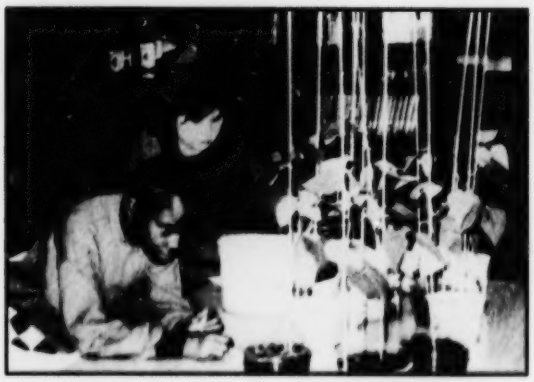
In order to eliminate stereotypes about individuals with disabilities, children and parents need to receive accurate information about disabilities and individuals who have them. Schools can sponsor educational sessions about people with disabilities, presenting information through puppetry, testimonials by individuals with disabilities and/or their parents, books, pictures, and displays of specialized equipment such as hearing aids, braces, or communication devices. Local chapters of advocacy organizations, such as Arc (formerly the Association for Retarded Citizens), United Cerebral Palsy, or the Epilepsy Foundation can also be used as resources for information about people with particular disabilities.

❑ Tell Parents When Friendships Develop

Because parents rarely have opportunities to observe their children during the school day, they may have no idea that their children have friends at school. Lack of knowledge about their

children's friendships can contribute to parents believing that their children cannot make friends. When teachers inform parents of budding relationships between children with and without disabilities, parents learn that such relationships are possible for their children, and can then take an active role in nurturing them.

■ What Community Recreation Staff Can Do



Community recreation personnel can create many ideal opportunities for children with and without disabilities to meet, get to know each other, and become friends through participation in a variety of recreation activities. Community recreation agencies, which already include individuals with varying abilities in their regular recreation programming, have offered us the following recommendations for ensuring inclusive recreation that encourages the development of children's relationships.

❑ Welcome All Children in Recreation Programs

Community recreation staff can develop mission statements that explicitly state an agency's intention and ability to serve persons with varying abilities. Brochures and news releases that advertise programs should invite participation by individuals with disabilities, and clearly indicate who to contact if an individual needs accommodations in order to participate in a program. In this way, an agency can make a public statement that individuals with disabilities are welcome and will be served inclusively.

❑ Ensure Architectural Accessibility

Community recreation staff should be certain that their facilities, parking lots, and playgrounds are physically accessible for individuals with disabilities. For example, ramps, elevators, curb cuts, reserved parking spots, and accessible drinking fountains and rest rooms should all be in place and operative to accommodate individuals who need them.

❑ Ensure Program Accessibility

Participants who register for community recreation programs need assurance that their special needs can be met in those programs. Community recreation agencies need to be prepared to meet individual needs by adapting activities or equipment, providing one-to-one assistance, educating nondisabled participants about disabilities, and managing behaviors.

Community recreation personnel can create many ideal opportunities for children with and without disabilities to meet, get to know each other, and become friends through participation in a variety of recreation activities.

❑ Educate Staff to Meet Individual Needs

If program leaders lack knowledge and experience in working with individuals with disabilities, they may feel reluctant or unqualified to serve them. Agencies should take responsibility to educate their staff in disability issues and up-to-date strategies for including participants with disabilities in recreation programs. Through education and experience, recreation staff can change their attitudes about inclusion, and gain confidence and expertise in meeting participants' individual needs.

❑ Provide Cooperative Activities that Promote Positive Peer Interactions

Community recreation staff may need to re-evaluate their programs to ensure that inclusive activities can become a reality. They might ask themselves: Can all participants be involved in programs to their full potential? Do programs emphasize competition and individual achievement at the expense of cooperation, social interaction, group learning goals, and relationship building, and friendship? Providing opportunities for children to play together in cooperative groups reinforces inclusion, socialization, interdependence, and an awareness and appreciation of others.

❑ Coordinate After-School Activities and School Schedules

Because of a shortage of school buses or funds to pay drivers, in many communities bus drivers need to stop at more than one school to drive children home. Consequently, school days may end at various times within one community. Because of this situation, community recreation staff should pay close attention to school dismissal times and coordinate schedules for after-school programs so that children with and without disabilities can attend them.

Community Recreation Staff Can . . .

- ❑ **Welcome children of all ability levels.**
- ❑ **Provide for architectural accessibility.**
- ❑ **Provide for program accessibility.**
- ❑ **Educate staff to meet children's individual needs.**
- ❑ **Provide cooperative activities that promote positive peer interactions.**
- ❑ **Coordinate after-school offerings with school schedules.**

■ Conclusion

For children with and without disabilities to become friends, they must have opportunities to be together as peers in recreation activities. Parents, school personnel, and community recreation staff all play an essential role in creating and shaping these opportunities. However, simply putting children with and without disabilities together in the same setting does not guarantee positive interactions. If participants with differing abilities are to have friendship-promoting experiences in recreation activities, it is necessary to teach specific skills to individuals, as well as to carefully structure the program environment. The next chapter presents guidelines for promoting positive interactions between children once they're together in recreation activities.

4 How to Facilitate Friendship Development in Recreation Activities

Techniques for Use by School and Community Recreation Staff

In the early days of integration, it was commonly believed that simply putting children with and without disabilities together in the same setting would cause them to interact positively. Sometimes, this fortunate effect did happen, but not usually. The seeds of positive attitudes cannot be assumed to exist, but have to be sown and then cultivated in a carefully structured manner. This chapter presents several techniques to achieve that outcome. The information presented here is intended for use by school personnel and recreation staff, in collaboration with families and other careproviders.

Chapter 4: How to Facilitate Friendship

- ❑ **Planning for Friendship Using Focus Groups** *Page 27*
- ❑ **10 Guidelines for Facilitating Friendships** *Page 35*
- ❑ **Tips for Leading Small Groups** *Page 41*
- ❑ **Avoiding Common Problems** *Page 45*

■ Planning for Friendship Using Focus Groups

Earlier in this handbook we described the benefits of and barriers to friendships between children with and without disabilities. School personnel and community recreation staff may wish to supplement the material presented in chapters one and two by gathering additional information about the children and families in their communities. While children, families, school personnel, and recreation staff in many locations will find their experiences similar to those described in chapters one and two, there are unique features of every community and those who live there. By gathering information on your locale you can ensure that the strategies chosen for enhancing friendships are appropriate to the needs and characteristics of the children there, and that the strategies have the support of the adults in the lives of those children.

An effective tool for gathering this information and promoting collaboration between adults in encouraging children's friendships is the focus group. Through focus groups, people who share a common concern - but who typically represent diverse viewpoints - come together to express their opinions, discuss issues, exchange ideas, and generate solutions. This section provides "how-to" guidelines for organizing and conducting focus groups. (For a more complete description of a focus group in action, please refer to *Appendix F: Use of Family Focus Groups in the Dowling Friendship Program.*)

Note: Portions of this section on focus groups are adapted from Krueger, R. (1988). Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

In Focus Groups . . .

- ❑ **Participants share a common concern, need, or experience.**
- ❑ **A warm, supportive, non-judgmental environment is provided.**
- ❑ **Participants meet for a specific, well-defined purpose.**
- ❑ **Meetings take place on a time-limited basis.**
- ❑ **Seven to ten participants are typically involved.**
- ❑ **Participants generally do not know each other.**
- ❑ **Participants sit in close proximity.**
- ❑ **The moderator is knowledgeable in the subject area and skillful in handling group dynamics.**
- ❑ **Open-ended questions are used.**
- ❑ **The discussion resembles a group interview.**
- ❑ **The objective is to hear all opinions, not to reach consensus.**

❑ A Description of Focus Groups

A focus group is a guided group discussion that brings together people to freely share their perspectives on a given topic without judgment or censorship. Common characteristics of effective focus groups include:

- **Participants share a common concern, need, or experience.** Participants may all use the same service, attend the same program, use the same product, be employed at the same workplace, or live in the same community. If the common concern is friendship development between children with and without disabilities, key individuals from children's lives may be included as focus group participants. Group members might include parents, siblings, classroom teachers, therapeutic recreation specialists, speech therapists, occupational or physical therapists, social workers, and youth organization leaders, among others.
- **A warm, supportive, non-judgmental environment is provided.** The atmosphere of the focus group should resemble an "open forum" for free-flowing dialogue and the exchange of ideas.
- **Participants meet for a specific, well-defined purpose.** Typical purposes might be to assess needs, identify problem areas, test products, brainstorm ideas, obtain feedback, and/or evaluate services. Purposes related to friendship development between children with and without disabilities might include: to develop a vision for how friendships might look; to identify barriers to friendship development; to identify potential friends from the neighborhood; to identify community recreation resources for families to use; and to brainstorm ways teachers, families, and recreation personnel can cooperate to provide opportunities for children with varying abilities to participate in recreation activities together.
- **Meetings take place on a time-limited basis.** Individuals generally meet in focus groups for one time only, for a period of one to two hours. A topic such as friendship development, which is ongoing and dynamic in nature, may require several focus group meetings over a designated period of time.
- **Seven to ten participants are typically involved.** If fewer than seven individuals participate, one or two people tend to dominate the discussion; if more than 10 individuals are involved, the group tends to fragment into smaller groups and side discussions.
- **Participants generally do not know each other.** While participants share a common concern, they usually have not met before. Lack of familiarity among group members can contribute to their willingness to disclose impressions and opinions more freely. If the topic is friendship development, however, it might be advantageous to organize meetings so that participants can socialize and, if they choose to do so, form relationships.

- **Participants sit in close proximity.** Group members usually sit in a circle, so that everyone can comfortably see and hear each other.
- **The moderator is knowledgeable in the subject area and skillful in handling group dynamics.** A moderator may be a neutral person from outside the organization, an administrator, a program director, a parent, a social worker, an interested community member, or any individual familiar with the issue and able to manage group interaction. Facilitating a group discussion is as much an art as a science, requiring considerable preparation and practice (see the following section, *How to Conduct a Focus Group*, for tips for effective moderators). Potential moderators for discussions about friendships include parents, administrators, school social workers, school psychologists, therapeutic recreation specialists, recreation program directors, and activity group leaders.
- **Open-ended questions are used**. To extract frank, thoughtful, and in-depth responses from group members, open-ended questions are asked. The moderator uses follow-up questions, or probes, to clarify unclear statements, expand upon particularly intriguing comments, elicit concrete examples, or uncover the feelings and reasons behind statements.
- **The discussion resembles a group interview.** By involving a number of individuals in a focused dialogue, group members hear each other's observations, new ideas are stimulated, and excitement about the subject area is generated.
- **The objective is to hear all opinions, not to reach consensus.** While recurring themes generally emerge from focus groups, the emphasis is not on obtaining general agreement, but on exposing all sides of an issue in an open discussion of pros and cons.

Though focus groups typically share these characteristics, the focus group process is highly flexible and may be adapted to a variety of individual needs and situations. For example, as noted above, focus groups usually meet only one time to address a specific question. However, if an area of interest is of an essentially dynamic nature, such as the inclusion of individuals with disabilities, it may be preferable to schedule a series of sessions to gain the perspectives of participants over time. If the issue is complex, such as how to accommodate an individual with a disability in a community program, one may wish to divide the issue into subtopics that may be addressed separately over a series of meetings. Or, if an issue affects a large number of people, one may wish to conduct several focus groups to ensure that all viewpoints are represented.

❑ How to Conduct a Focus Group

This section presents a step-by-step process for planning, leading, and evaluating focus groups. As mentioned earlier, there is no single correct way to conduct a focus group. The following

How to Conduct a Focus Group

- ❑ **Plan the focus group.**
- ❑ **Lead the focus group.**
- ❑ **Evaluate the focus group.**

recommendations are intended as flexible guidelines that can be adapted to suit individual needs and circumstances.

- **Planning the Focus Group**

Before focus group members meet, several tasks need to be completed. While the list of preliminary tasks presented below might give the impression that the tasks occur sequentially, many of the steps, in fact, could occur simultaneously. Regardless of the order in which tasks are completed, a carefully planned focus group reduces the likelihood that any unexpected occurrences might disrupt the flow of the actual meeting.

- **Clearly define and communicate the purpose of the group.** Defining the purpose may be the most difficult task in planning the focus group. It is also the most important. A clearly defined purpose can help capture the interest of potential focus group participants, keep the discussion on track, and aid in evaluation of the outcomes of the discussion.
- **Determine who to include in the focus group.** Decide who can best answer the questions related to your purpose. Generally, a heterogeneous group (i.e., persons with different roles, backgrounds, ages) is desired in order to include the full spectrum of people's diverse views. When addressing friendship development, include those who best know the children involved.
- **Develop a written plan.** The written plan should begin with a summary of the problem, a statement about why the focus group is needed, and a description of the purpose. A plan of action that describes how participants will be recruited, who will be responsible for which tasks, and where and when the focus group will take place will also need to be outlined. Additionally, a meeting agenda, timeline for conducting and evaluating the focus group, and realistic budget should be developed.
- **Recruit focus group members.** As a general rule, one recruits by over-recruiting. Because of schedule conflicts or lack of motivation to attend, usually two to three times more participants than are actually desired will need to be solicited. If group members have a vested, personal interest in the issue - such as friendship development for their children - additional incentives may not be necessary to motivate them to attend. If the issue is of a more neutral nature, however, incentives such as money, food, gifts, or free program passes may need to be offered to encourage participation. Personalized confirmation letters, with an explanation of the purpose of the meeting and clear directions, along with follow-up phone calls are necessary for a high participant turnout. If focus group members are handpicked, as is usually necessary for groups encouraging friendships, it is recommended that participants be called in advance and meetings scheduled when participants are able to attend.

Planning the Focus Group

- ❑ **Clearly define and communicate the purpose.**
- ❑ **Determine who to include.**
- ❑ **Develop a written plan.**
- ❑ **Recruit members.**
- ❑ **Formulate interview questions.**
- ❑ **Obtain a meeting site.**
- ❑ **Provide "conference-type" circular seating.**
- ❑ **Arrange for recording equipment and other materials.**
- ❑ **Plan for refreshments.**

- **Formulate the interview questions.** To develop the questioning route for the discussion, make a list of general areas of concern, formulate questions about these areas, then arrange the questions in a logical sequence. Usually, between five and ten questions are sufficient. Questions that ask "How?" or "What?" generally provide more in-depth, thoughtful responses than "Why?" questions, which tend to put respondents on the defensive. Avoid questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no" and that typically yield little information. After the interview questions are developed, test them out with individuals who will not be involved in the focus group to see if the questions are understandable and yield the kind of information sought. Finally, revise the questions, eliminating or adding questions as needed.
- **Obtain a meeting site.** Select a site that is accessible to individuals with disabilities, easy to locate, and has free, convenient parking. Focus groups may take place at community centers, schools, libraries, hotels, restaurants, churches, synagogues, or private homes. Discussion rooms should be clean, comfortable, and free from visual or auditory distractions. If possible, visit the facility beforehand to confirm that the environment and accommodations are accessible and conducive to group discussion. When selecting a site to discuss friendship development, choose a site that is familiar to the group members. This will help to establish a sense of belonging and equal ownership by all the participants. A common site might be the school the children attend, a day care center, or a neighborhood recreation center.
- **Provide "conference-type," circular seating.** Comfortable chairs should be situated around a large conference table or group of tables arranged in a circle. When discussing friendships, a more relaxed, informal arrangement of furniture might be preferable.
- **Arrange for recording equipment and other materials.** To record responses accurately, focus groups are generally audiotaped. Audiotaping is less obtrusive than videotaping and more reliable than note-taking. Always ask participants for their permission to audiotape and assure them of the confidentiality of their responses. Other materials that may be useful when conducting focus groups include a flip chart, markers, name tags, note paper, handouts, written surveys, and pens or pencils.
- **Plan for refreshments.** Light refreshments add a touch of hospitality to the meeting, help group members feel at ease, and create valuable opportunities for socializing.

Though focus groups typically share these characteristics, it is important to remember that the focus group process is highly flexible and may be adapted to a variety of individual needs and situations.

- **Leading the Focus Group**

When group members arrive, the moderator should greet people in a friendly manner, engage them in light conversation, and have refreshments available. The moderator must be aware of potentially quiet or domineering group members. Using circular seating, shy

individuals should be invited to sit across from the moderator, where eye contact can be established easily. Conversely, domineering participants should be placed on the sides, where eye contact can be more easily averted.

When beginning the discussion, it is important to create a non-threatening, accepting environment. The moderator should welcome everyone, introduce himself or herself, and invite all participants to introduce themselves. It is then time to restate the purpose of the discussion, clarify the agenda, mention any housekeeping concerns, and establish any ground rules. These introductory remarks could address the confidential handling of responses, point out the necessity of an audiorecorder to accurately gather information, ask for participants' permission to audiotape the session, invite group members to ask questions, let participants know the location of restrooms, indicate how long the discussion will last, or remind participants that there are no right or wrong answers.

When leading the group interview, the moderator must be keenly aware of group dynamics, observe for nonverbal messages, and anticipate the flow of the discussion. Tips for effective moderators include:

- Create a warm, friendly atmosphere.
- Be knowledgeable in the topic area. Know the jargon.
- Dress similarly to the participants.
- Memorize the interview protocol so you can look directly at the participants, not at your notes.
- Listen empathetically and with genuine interest.
- Allow group members ample time to respond (wait at least 10 seconds after asking a question).
- Emphasize that every opinion is important.
- Probe participants' answers early so they will provide precise information. Typical probes include: "Could you explain that further?," "Do you have an example?," "I don't understand. Would you tell me more?," and "What experiences make you feel that way?"
- Maintain control of the group dynamics in an unobtrusive manner.
- Avoid expressing personal opinions or evaluating participants' comments. Be neutral, or "beige," in all reactions.
- Be flexible, but keep the discussion on track. Gauge when to explore an issue more fully and when to move on to a new question.
- Keep a sense of humor.

When leading the group interview, the moderator must be keenly aware of group dynamics, observe for nonverbal messages, and anticipate the flow of the discussion.

When concluding the discussion, a "wrap-up" question may be useful for summarizing information and lending a sense of closure to the meeting. Inviting participants to offer additional comments or questions can also uncover information that might have been

overlooked. If appropriate or necessary, plans for subsequent meetings can be made. The moderator should thank the participants for their time and input, and distribute incentive payments, if appropriate. Finally, as group members leave, the moderator should be available to answer any questions the participants might have.

• Evaluating the Focus Group

After conducting the focus group, it may seem difficult - if not impossible - to pull together the wealth of information and draw accurate conclusions about the discussion. To digest, interpret, and evaluate the numerous comments that have been expressed, ask yourself the following questions:

- What was the general mood or tone of the meeting?
- What were the characteristics of the group members?
- What did the participants' body language, nonverbal communication, or other behaviors suggest?
- What common themes, comments, or opinions recurred throughout the discussion?
- What divergent viewpoints were expressed?
- What shifts in mood, philosophy, or opinions occurred during the course of the meeting?
- What new questions or information emerged?
- How well did the discussion meet the original purpose of the meeting?
- How will the information be used and disseminated (e.g., to prepare a report, incorporate recommendations into an existing program, provide feedback to focus group participants, present outcomes to the Board of Directors)?

While considering these questions, review the audiotape, taking notes and/or transcribing the discussion. To reduce the possibility that the results will be biased by a moderator's opinions, an assistant moderator can help conduct and evaluate the focus group. Together, the moderator and the assistant can compare their observations, cross-check opinions with actual comments made by the participants, and develop a report based on their mutual agreement.

❑ Focus Group Advantages

There are several reasons why the focus group approach has gained popularity as a means of gathering information. Focus groups:

- Provide direct contact with the consumer of a product or service.
- Reduce the risk of investing in ideas that ultimately will not fit consumer needs.

Tips for Moderators

- ❑ **Create a warm, friendly atmosphere.**
- ❑ **Know the topic and the jargon.**
- ❑ **Dress like the participants.**
- ❑ **Memorize the interview procedure.**
- ❑ **Look at participants, not your notes.**
- ❑ **Listen empathetically.**
- ❑ **Allow time to respond.**
- ❑ **Emphasize the importance of every opinion.**
- ❑ **Probe answers.**
- ❑ **Unobtrusively control group dynamics.**
- ❑ **Keep your reactions neutral.**
- ❑ **Be flexible, but stay on track.**
- ❑ **Keep a sense of humor.**

- Encourage self-disclosure through a non-judgmental atmosphere.
- Follow a flexible format that allows the moderator to follow up on comments that require more in-depth exploration.
- Stimulate new ideas through group discussion.
- Produce results relatively easily, efficiently, and at a reasonable expense.

In addition to using focus groups to encourage friendships between children with varying abilities, the groups can be applied to a number of other areas related to inclusive recreation for individuals with disabilities. For example, focus groups can help decision-makers gather information before, during, or after recreation programs. When planning programs, focus groups may be used to engage individuals with different roles but similar interests - participants, parents, group leaders, supervisors, and administrators - in dialogue about services, facilities, and expectations. Focus groups can also be valuable mechanisms for recruiting participants, advertising a service, establishing trust between recreation agencies and participants, and creating links between community agencies. During a program, focus groups may be useful for gathering ongoing participant feedback about the quality of inclusive services. Program participants may also be solicited to solve problems which arise about inclusion during a program. As a means of evaluating programs, focus groups can be used to develop recommendations for use in program planning, information about public perceptions of the organization can be obtained, and administrators can learn firsthand about the benefits or limitations of their services for participants.

❑ Summary

...focus groups offer a constructive and practical means to discuss, brainstorm, and problem-solve issues related to friendship development between children with and without disabilities.

In summary, the focus group model presented in this section provides a process that enables diverse groups of individuals to discuss a variety of topics. This model is offered not with the intent that it be followed verbatim, but as a "menu" from which to select and adapt those components that best fit the particular situation, participants' needs, and nature of the questions involved. The key to using the focus group process rests in utilizing its flexible nature to the fullest. As a tool with considerable adaptability, focus groups offer a constructive and practical means to discuss, brainstorm, and problem-solve issues related to friendship development between children with and without disabilities.

■ 10 Guidelines for Facilitating Friendships

As school and community recreation personnel implement programs that facilitate friendship development between children with and without disabilities, activity leaders will need to exercise skills to promote positive interactions between participants. The following 10 guidelines are a synthesis of techniques and approaches that have been found to be effective in meeting this need. Leaders of recreation activities can use these approaches to increase the likelihood that children with and without disabilities will enjoy and benefit from their time together.

❑ Guideline 1: Structure Activities and Surroundings to Promote Cooperative Interactions

Without structuring a situation for cooperative interactions, nondisabled individuals often view their peers with disabilities in negative ways, feel discomfort and uncertainty in interacting with them, and sometimes even reject them. Group activities usually follow one of three models of participant interaction: **competitive, individualistic,** or **cooperative**. Each has strengths, and sometimes they can be combined.

The **competitive** model, in its traditional application, leads to one person in a group winning, with all the other group members losing. In a group where one or more of the members has a disability, it is likely those individuals will "come in last." An example of competitive structuring would be a group of children, some of whom have movement difficulties, lining up in canoes at the edge of a lake for a race. Each has a canoe and a paddle to use. The camp director tells them that the person who reaches the other side of the lake first will win a canoe paddle. The children with poor coordination and low muscle tone will not have much chance of winning.

In an **individualistic** structure, each member of a group works to improve his or her own past performance. Potentially, every member of the group, including members with disabilities, can win a prize for improvement. The targets for improvement should not be set too high or inappropriately matched with a disability condition. Using the canoe example again, the leader lines the group up on the shore of the lake and tells them that last week when they paddled across the lake each person's crossing time was recorded. Then, the leader says

Guidelines for Facilitating Friendships

- ❑ **Structure activities and surroundings to promote cooperative interactions.**
- ❑ **Determine primary purpose of activity.**
- ❑ **Determine desired participant roles.**
- ❑ **Recruit nondisabled participants.**
- ❑ **Strengthen friendship skills of nondisabled participants.**
- ❑ **Use supporting curriculum.**
- ❑ **Prepare other adults as integration facilitators.**
- ❑ **Conduct an environmental analysis inventory.**
- ❑ **Implement partial participation strategies.**
- ❑ **Promote inclusion as everyone's responsibility.**

Note: The *Guidelines for Facilitating Friendships*, as well as the introduction of this chapter, are adapted from Rynders, J. & Schleien, S. (1991). Together successfully: Creating recreational and educational programs that integrate people with and without disabilities. Arlington, TX: The Association for Retarded Citizens - United States, National 4-H, and the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota.

that people who improve their times will win canoe paddles, even if the improvement is small.

Cooperative activities are very helpful if peer friendship is the goal. A cooperative learning structure creates an interdependence because the group's attainment of a goal with everyone contributing is the quality that determines winning. Using the canoe illustration, the leader might have the children climb into a large canoe, give each child a paddle, and tell them they are each to paddle as hard as they can and that they will all win a prize if they work together to keep the canoe inside some floating markers (placed in such a way that perfection in paddling isn't required). The leader will need to determine that everyone is paddling, and that they are encouraging and assisting one another.

From a *socialization* standpoint, the cooperative structure is the best means to achieve positive social interactions and successful inclusion. In a competitive situation, children are concentrating on paddling the fastest; they don't have time for socialization. Similarly, in an individualistic structure, children are concentrating on bettering their past performances; again, there is no incentive for socialization. In the cooperative structure, however, each person wants to encourage every other person to achieve a group goal that is realistically attainable. This promotes positive social interactions such as encouragement, cheering, and pats on the back.

❑ Guideline 2: Determine Primary Purpose of Activity: Skill Development, Socialization, Both

...the cooperative structure is the best means to achieve positive social interactions and successful inclusion.

Most activities promote both skill development and socialization, but at times, one objective is given priority over the other. For instance, a program leader may designate certain periods of the year primarily for project completion, such as the months preceding an exhibit of work at a science fair or county fair. These will be times when participants - especially those without disabilities - will be intent on finishing individual projects, and socialization will be minimal and potentially regarded as a distraction. During these times, the leader must be clear about the intent of the activity to avoid creating situations in which participants are frustrated by trying to fulfill conflicting objectives. When skill development is the focus, the program must be organized so that both participants with and without disabilities can pursue that objective.

❑ Guideline 3: Determine Desired Participant Roles

It is important that the program leader determine whether the nondisabled peers will be interacting with peers who have disabilities as **tutors, companions,** or **both** at the same time. The primary role of a **peer tutor** is to teach a skill to a peer with a disability. This is a "vertical" relationship, with the tutor as "teacher" and their peer as the "pupil." A typical example of a peer tutor role is where a 12-year-old child without a disability comes to a special class and works

one-to-one on picture recognition skills with a 6-year-old child with a disability. The child with a disability, however, need not always be the one who receives "help". A child with a disability can, and should, experience a giving as well as a receiving role.

The primary purpose of a **peer companion model** is to promote positive social interactions between a child with a disability and a child without a disability. The relationship is "horizontal," that is, a relatively equalized, turn-taking relationship. For example, two peers can make a pizza by taking turns putting on the ingredients and by washing the dishes together. The peers should be approximately the same age; it is appropriate if the child without a disability is one or two years older, but, if the child with a disability is older, a socially awkward situation may be created.

It would seem that a peer tutoring approach is used if the primary objective is the acquisition of specific skills, and a peer friendship approach is used if social interaction is the main objective. But making a choice between the two is not generally necessary. Leaders can opt for initially concentrating on the facilitation of friendship, later allowing skill acquisition to occur in the natural course of the friendship.

❑ Guideline 4: Recruit Nondisabled Participants

A helpful tool for recruiting nondisabled participants - as well as adult volunteers - is a slide presentation that illustrates people with and without disabilities interacting in natural and interesting ways. This provides a positive image for prospective participants, many of whom lack exposure to persons with disabilities, have stereotypes of persons with disabilities, or have had negative experiences with persons who have disabilities. Recruitment presentations that depict positive interactions between persons with and without disabilities help create the expectation that potential group members will have a positive experience.

❑ Guideline 5: Strengthen Friendship Skills of Nondisabled Participants

Children without disabilities usually know how to interact in a friendly manner with children who have disabilities, but they may need to have their friendship skills sharpened or expanded. They may need instruction in how to cope with communication, movement, and other types of challenges that they have never previously experienced. Meetings should occur frequently where nondisabled group members and leaders can discuss how a particular interaction problem can be overcome, suggest new ideas for interacting, and identify specific techniques that can be used during one-to-one activities (see *How to Act as a Peer Companion*, page 38, for a list of techniques). When nondisabled peers apply themselves to figuring out how to enhance participation of a partner with a disability, it builds empathy, self-awareness, and maturity.

It is important that the program leader determine whether the nondisabled peers will be interacting with peers who have disabilities as tutors, companions, or both at the same time.

Tips for Students: How to Act as a Peer Companion

- ❑ **Welcome your partner and stay close to him/her during the activity.**
- ❑ **Smile, talk pleasantly, and try to maintain eye contact when talking.**
- ❑ **Divide up tasks to encourage your partner to be involved.**
- ❑ **Make the activity enjoyable and let your partner know you are having a good time.**
- ❑ **Take turns. Your partner may not be used to this, so be patient. Don't help too much or too soon. But, if he/she appears to be confused, losing interest, or frustrated, step in. To assist, describe (pleasantly) how to perform the task, then invite him/her to do it. If that doesn't work... Show how to do the task as you continue to explain how to do it. Then invite him/her to do it like you did. If that doesn't work... Guide him/her through the task by gently nudging his/her arm toward it, or by actually moving your partner's hand to perform the task while explaining how to do it. Then, invite him/her to do it.**
- ❑ **Say something pleasant about your time together as the activity ends.**

❑ Guideline 6: Use a Supporting Curriculum to Enhance Knowledge of Companionship

Suggested topics for discussion include:

- **How Do We Play Together?** Discuss how companions take turns, say nice things to each other, help each other out when a task is difficult, stay close to each other, smile, and so forth. During activities, reinforce the interaction techniques children are applying.
- **How Do We Communicate?** Discuss communication tips, such as talking slowly, allowing time for a response, trying another way to communicate if a companion does not understand, and not giving up. The use of simple manual signs (e.g., "hello," "good," "you," "me," "friend") can be introduced.
- **What Is A Prosthesis?** Discuss the use of tools (e.g., ladder, paint brush) that people without disabilities need in order to do certain tasks (e.g., paint a house). Show examples of a prosthesis (e.g., artificial limb, adapted equipment) and explain how it is a tool that people with disabilities use.
- **How Does A Person With A Disability Live In The Community?** Invite a person with disabilities to talk about how he or she travels from home to work, goes camping, shops, and so on.
- **What Is A Best Friend?** Discuss the nature of friendship. Ask participants to think about similarities and differences in their relationship with a friend with a disability and a friend without a disability.

❑ Guideline 7: Prepare Other Adults as Integration Facilitators

An integration facilitator is an individual who assists the child with a disability to participate successfully during an inclusive recreation program. These adult leaders are instrumental in facilitating social interactions and relationships in activities that include children with varying abilities. The following is an illustration of how a facilitator might promote cooperative interactions in an art activity:

- **Prompt positive interactions** when they are not occurring, (e.g., "Mary, I'll bet that Jennifer would like to paint with you").
- **Reinforce positive interactions** when they are not occurring, (e.g., "Bill and Jim, you both did a really nice job with the mural"). Rewarding words should not be given out indiscriminately; they should be given immediately after the desired behavior occurs.
- **Redirect behaviors** if either partner gets off task or is behaving inappropriately, such as the nondisabled partner becoming too absorbed in a project, or too autocratic or laissez-faire in his or her interactions, or the participant with a disability wandering away from their companion.

- **Step in if a situation is deteriorating** (e.g., a child has a tantrum). Sometimes a child will need to be removed for a cooling-off period. The facilitator will gauge the seriousness of a problem and move in quickly if it is beginning to get out of control.

Other tasks that may be performed by the integration facilitator are:

- Assist the participant during registration.
- Explain to nondisabled peers the nature of the participant's disability, if the participant is not able to do so.
- Manage problem behaviors if they occur.
- Facilitate interpersonal relationships with classmates.
- Physically prompt the participant to perform a task (for example, helping a person with poor balance to bend over to touch toes in an exercise class).
- Break down recreation skills into small steps so they can be learned more easily by the participant.
- Evaluate participant's progress in the recreation program.
- Provide transportation assistance to and from the recreation site.
- Assist with toileting, dressing, or grooming.
- Assist with mobility throughout program (for example, pushing wheelchair, walking beside and providing needed support).

❑ Guideline 8: Conduct an Environmental Analysis Inventory to Identify Further Instructional Needs

At times, it may be desirable to assess an individual's skill level in a particular activity. An Environmental Analysis Inventory can be conducted to determine the specific components of the activity that the individual has already mastered and those that require additional training. This inventory can be defined as a systematic method of conducting an observation of an event as it occurs in a natural setting under typical conditions. Through the environmental analysis inventory, component tasks of an activity are identified and instructional sequences developed. An individual is then given opportunities to perform the component tasks in order to determine current skill levels and highlight further instructional needs. This inventory is also instrumental in identifying appropriate teaching strategies, as well as modifications to enhance participation and friendship development.

An adult leader, along with the participant, parents, and, if necessary, other key players, should identify specific modifications, or adaptations, needed to help the individual participate in the recreation program.

❑ Guideline 9: Implement Partial Participation Strategies

Partial participation affirms the right to participate alongside nondisabled peers in a variety of recreational programs that are

advertised to the general public. The principle of partial participation affirms, among other things, that persons with disabilities should be allowed to participate in environments and activities, at least partially, without regard to degree of dependence or level of functioning. Furthermore, this principle assumes that participation in these environments and activities is advantageous to the person with a disability.

Participation is particularly beneficial when it is approached systematically and with an awareness of not only the inherent skills and abilities of the participant, but also the individualized adaptations necessary to enhance participation. The adult leader should be able to determine an individual's appropriateness as a participant in a particular activity, current skills and abilities related to the activity, and the physical and social needs that might require individualized attention prior to participation. An adult leader, along with the participant, parents, and, if necessary, other key players, should then identify specific modifications or adaptations needed to help the individual participate in the recreation program.

When planning for adaptations, three main guidelines should be considered:

- **Provide adaptations on an individual basis** to meet individual needs. Adaptations that work for one person may not necessarily be suitable for another. For example, just because one person with a developmental disability may need continual one-to-one assistance to participate in a basketball program, not all people with developmental disabilities will automatically require such intensified instruction. Depending on individual needs, a participant may require adult assistance only at particular times during the activity, assistance from a peer may be adequate, or the person may be able to perform the activity independently.
- **Provide adaptations only when necessary.** Based on the Environmental Analysis Inventory, identify the individual's need for the adaptation and provide ample modifications to promote participation, success, and enjoyment.
- **View any changes or adaptations as temporary.** A primary goal of adaptations is to support the person in learning the necessary skills to eventually perform the activity as a nondisabled peer would perform it. Unless the adaptation is inherently necessary, such as a built-up tennis shoe for a person with one leg shorter than the other or a sighted guide for a cross-country skier who is blind, program modifications should be designed as temporary changes. For example, a person may initially need one-to-one assistance to participate in an aerobics program. As the participant gains familiarity with the protocol of the environment and learns the exercise routines, support should be gradually faded until the person is able to participate independently.

Programmatic adaptations may include modifications to one or more of the following items: materials or equipment, rules of the

Guidelines for Adaptations

- ❑ **Provide adaptations on an individual basis.**
- ❑ **Provide adaptations only when necessary.**
- ❑ **View any changes or adaptations as temporary.**

game, the skill sequence, or the environment. Additionally, lead-up activities, such as learning to play pinball in an arcade by first practicing on a portable pinball machine at home, may be provided in preparation for teaching complex leisure skills. To explain further, materials or equipment may be adapted to enable the participant to manipulate objects more easily. The original rules of a game may be changed to simplify the activity. The steps required in an activity may be rearranged to enhance safety and efficiency. The environment may be modified to promote accessibility to community recreation facilities, parks, and playgrounds. Finally, lead-up activities may be provided to allow practice in basic component skills of an activity prior to full participation.

❑ Guideline 10: Promote Inclusion as Everyone's Responsibility

Schools and community recreation providers must assume a leadership position in assuring equal access to their services, and "key" individuals, such as group home staff members, parents, and teachers, must assist with the inclusion process. These individuals can help recreation directors and activity leaders complete environmental analysis inventories and decide on appropriate adaptations to enhance participation in programs, serve on community advisory boards to assure that inclusion occurs, assist in recreation staff inservice training, and recruit volunteers (for greater detail on traits that key individuals should look for in inclusive recreation programs, see *Appendix G: Indicators of Quality in Integrated Community Recreation).*

■ Tips for Leading Small Groups

When planning activities for small groups (i.e., 4 to 10 participants) of elementary-age children, several factors need to be considered. These include the abilities and limitations of the children, group dynamics, the appropriateness of activities, and how to structure environments. No matter how much planning goes into activities, one cannot know for certain how successful the activities will be until children actually participate in them. There are, however, ways to increase the likelihood of a positive outcome. In addition to following the recommendations presented in the section, *Guidelines for Facilitating Friendships* (see page 35), activity leaders can implement the following tips for leading small groups of children.

Tips for Leading Small Groups

- ❑ **Develop a lesson plan.**
- ❑ **Select appropriate setting and room arrangement.**
- ❑ **Establish guidelines for conduct.**
- ❑ **Arrange seating to promote social interaction.**
- ❑ **Give clear, concise instructions.**
- ❑ **Select activities to promote cooperation.**
- ❑ **Equalize interactions between children.**
- ❑ **Convert "object-oriented" to "people-oriented" activities.**
- ❑ **Adapt activities to meet individual needs.**
- ❑ **Keep the activity child-focused.**
- ❑ **Structure activities to maintain interest.**
- ❑ **Establish continuity between sessions.**
- ❑ **Be flexible.**

❑ Develop a Lesson Plan

Carefully prepare the lesson plan so the activity will run as smoothly as possible. Plan enough activities to fill the period. If more than one activity will be used, plan for a smooth transition between activities. Be certain all the required materials are available and that activities are appropriate for the chronological age level and attention spans of the children. Be ready with a "bag of tricks" (e.g., a selection of games, projects, topics for conversation, jokes, or impromptu presentations) in the event planned activities take less time than anticipated or the children respond unenthusiastically to them.

❑ Select Appropriate Setting and Room Arrangement

Choose a setting appropriate for the activity and the program objectives. If the focus of the activity is on conversation or interaction between the children, or if the focus is on a game or a project, select a small, intimate, contained setting. This may be a small room, a screened-off portion of a larger room, or a self-made "fort" where the children can band together as for a club meeting. If the activity is gross motor in nature such as running, jumping, or skipping, choose a larger space (e.g., gym, multi-purpose room, outdoor playground) that offers the children sufficient freedom of movement.

❑ Establish Guidelines for Conduct

In large groups of children it is often necessary to establish firm guidelines for behavior and safety at the onset (e.g., "one person talks at a time," "keep play area clean," "no teasing," "no hitting") in order to maintain control of the group. In smaller groups, however, setting rules too soon can limit playful interactions, hamper children's creativity, and take "ownership" of the group away from the children. Establish a tone of mutual respect. Let the children know they are there to "have fun" and "make friends" (not to "win" or "be first"). Initially, observe the dynamics between the children, then intervene as needed to remind the children to be respectful and to act in a positive manner toward each other. Encourage the children to "listen to each other" (especially to those who require more time to talk), "respect each other's space," "notice when someone has done something well," and "compliment each other." Provide positive verbal reinforcement to the children when these behaviors occur. If the dynamics of the group dictate that firmer, more explicit rules be established, involve the children in developing the rules. Ask the children to repeat them, and review them when necessary.

❑ Arrange Seating to Promote Social Interaction

Invite the children to sit in a circle, either on the floor or in chairs around a table. In most cases, the adult should avoid sitting next to a

child with a disability, thereby increasing the child's opportunities to interact with other group members. If two or more children tend to cluster together in a clique, seat them apart from each other.

❑ Give Clear, Concise Instructions

Keep instructions brief, then immediately involve the children in the activity. If directions are too lengthy, the children will tend to lose interest and you may lose control of the group. Give directions in steps, rather than all at once. For children with special needs, break down directions into individual tasks so they can participate successfully according to their abilities. If the activity is an art or craft project, show the children a sample of a finished product to give them a clear image of what is expected.

❑ Select Activities to Promote Cooperation

Select cooperative, rather than competitive, activities where the children can work together to achieve a common goal (e.g., bake cookies, group jump rope, cake decorating). (See Guideline 1 of *Guidelines for Facilitating Friendships*, page 35).

❑ Equalize the Interactions Between the Children

Treat all the children equally, thus setting the tone to encourage equal interactions among group members. Let the children direct their own conversations and interactions as much as possible. Intervene in instances when one or more children dominate the group, children are not listening to each other, inappropriate topics of conversations arise, teasing occurs, or undesirable behaviors need to be managed. If a group member appears withdrawn, attempt to draw that person out by including him or her in the activity or discussion, asking the child questions, and making certain he or she is heard by the other group members. Have high expectations for participation by the children with disabilities, and select activities where all children can play an active, contributing role.

Treat all the children equally, thus setting the tone to encourage equal interactions among group members.

❑ Convert "Object-Oriented" Activities to "People-Oriented" Activities

Even though an activity requires children to look at and interact with play materials such as a computer, art supplies, or a ball - and not directly at or with each other - structure the activity in ways that promote social interactions. Remind the children to greet each other, take turns, share materials, provide feedback, and offer encouragement. Model the behaviors and verbalizations you wish the children to emulate. Provide the children with opportunities to enjoy informal times together where they can share personal information (e.g., about favorite activities, family members, pets, weekend events), or engage in conversations about topics of their own choosing.

❑ Adapt Activities to Meet Individual Needs

Learn the needs of each group member and how to individually meet them within the group. Adapt activities to emphasize similarities between group members. Take advantage of those times when other group members require adaptations or special assistance. This will minimize singling out a participant with a disability for adaptations. Let the group members brainstorm ways to adapt activities or include a child with special needs in the activity.

❑ Keep the Activity Child-Focused

Avoid including too many adults in the activity. Too much adult supervision can possibly harm the potential for participation and interaction by the children. Adults may be overprotective and "do for" a child instead of allowing the child to "do for him or herself," creating unnecessary dependency on the adult. Group members may be tempted to talk "through" the adult rather than directly to the child, if an adult is always available to assist a child with a disability. The presence of too many adults can also restrict the children's creativity, imagination, and freedom of expression. Adults should assume facilitator or enabler roles, giving guidance and establishing parameters while providing opportunities for the children to work out their own solutions to problems; test out their personalities and abilities in safe, accepting environments; and establish their own connections with other group members.

❑ Structure Activities to Maintain Interest

Structure the environment so that children maintain a high level of interest and involvement in the activity. Reduce "down time" by planning for smooth transitions, and by "moving the activity along." Let the children know in advance when they will need to shift gears and move to a new activity or environment.

Avoid including too many adults in the activity. Too much adult supervision can possibly harm the potential for participation and interaction by the children.

❑ Establish Continuity Between Sessions

Structured recreational programs for children usually meet once a week for time frames ranging from eight weeks to one year. To achieve a sense of continuity from week to week and strengthen group cohesiveness, involve the children in an ongoing activity (e.g., community service, gardening, art project), and in planning the next week's activity or suggesting themes for a "unit" of activities.

❑ Be Flexible

Most importantly, maintain an attitude of flexibility and fluidity in leading small group activities. Have alternate plans and materials available immediately if children are not receptive to an activity. Be in tune with the group dynamics and be willing to shift gears.

❑ Summary

The tips provided in this section offer programming principles for use with any group of elementary-age children, regardless of ability level. When the needs of children are addressed individually and with concern for mutual respect, maximum participation, cooperation, and socialization, *all* group members benefit.

■ Avoiding Common Problems

Occasionally our best intentions to provide inclusive environments turn sour because we create unnecessary problems for ourselves. Eight of these common problems are discussed below, along with suggestions to help avoid them.

❑ Problem 1: Integrating Too Quickly

One community club voted unanimously to bring Janice, who had severe emotional problems, into their club. They wanted her to join them immediately and be included in every activity. Their commendable enthusiasm turned to guilt when Janice soon had to be removed because the other children could not cope with her inappropriate behavior. The club leader and participants should have gradually phased the child into the program, choosing a short, social activity with which to begin.

❑ Problem 2: Emphasizing Socialization at the Wrong Time

Sometimes group leaders ask peers without disabilities to socialize with a peer who has a disability at times when the members are under pressure to finish a project. To avoid this problem, ask volunteers to assist the person with a disability, and let the participants without disabilities devote their time to their own projects. Or, have participants take turns helping a child with a disability with his or her project using a cooperative "round-robin" system.

❑ Problem 3: Age Mismatch

A young child without a disability will feel awkward if expected to interact with a substantially older child with a disability, particularly in a peer tutoring situation. A peer tutor structure works best

Occasionally our best intentions to provide inclusive environments turn sour because we create unnecessary problems for ourselves.

Note: *Avoiding Common Problems* is based on information in Rynders, J. & Schleien, S. (1991). Together successfully: Creating recreational and educational programs that integrate people with and without disabilities. Arlington, TX: The Association for Retarded Citizens - United States, National 4-H, and the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota.

when the tutor is considerably older than the person being tutored. When the expectation is friendship, the nondisabled peer should be at least as old as the child with a disability, and a couple years advantage may even be better.

❑ Problem 4: Lack of Preparation for Inclusion in New Situations

After organizing an inclusive program, carefully instructing nondisabled participants on how to socialize effectively, and instructing adult volunteers on what roles to take as facilitators, it will be necessary to assure that the same steps occur in other community environments in which the child with a disability will participate.

❑ Problem 5: Lack of Individualization

Individualization (i.e., meeting individual needs) for children with disabilities often comes naturally because of the frequent need to adapt activities. Peers without disabilities may also need to be introduced to integrated activities in an individualized fashion. For example, often nondisabled teenagers feel insecure in themselves and have difficulty extending comfortably to anyone.

Avoiding Common Problems

- ❑ **Problem 1: Integrating Too Quickly**
- ❑ **Problem 2: Emphasizing Socialization at the Wrong Time**
- ❑ **Problem 3: Age Mismatch**
- ❑ **Problem 4: Lack of Preparation for Inclusion in New Situations**
- ❑ **Problem 5: Lack of Individualization**
- ❑ **Problem 6: Failure to Take Advantage of Choice-Making Opportunities**
- ❑ **Problem 7: Sacrificing Participant Safety in the Name of Inclusion**
- ❑ **Problem 8: Children Assuming Teaching Roles**

❑ Problem 6: Failure to Take Advantage of Choice-Making Opportunities

After working months to achieve community inclusion, parents and service providers sometimes become frustrated when people with disabilities do not want to participate in integrated recreation and education activities. Recreation and education preferences are extremely individual, and failure to consider personal preferences will undermine even the most noble and enthusiastic inclusion efforts. Allow people with disabilities to sample various pre-selected activities, and to choose the activities in which they wish to participate. When people with disabilities are allowed to choose activities, they are more eager to learn the skills necessary to participate, they more readily generalize those skills to other settings, and they are more likely to continue to participate in those activities.

❑ Problem 7: Sacrificing Participant Safety in the Name of Inclusion

Emphasizing the safety of all participants as your first concern will reap benefits for everyone in your program. While a commitment to inclusion is admirable, it is inappropriate to sacrifice the safety of nondisabled students in implementing that ideal.

❑ Problem 8: Children Assuming Teaching Roles

Occasionally, a nondisabled child assumes a skill teaching role that should be assumed by an adult. Avoid having a child without disabilities teach essential or safety skills such as how to cross a street, put on a life preserver, or use a knife to cut food for lunch. These tasks are better left to parents or other adults.

❑ Summary

There are times when barriers or problems exist that will make inclusion difficult in recreation activities. It is important to anticipate these problems and use these or other strategies to overcome them and continue moving toward the goal of friendship development.

■ Conclusion

To nurture and maintain friendships between children with varying abilities, the key individuals in children's lives must work together. The strategies presented in this chapter can enable school and community recreation staff to assess community and individual needs through use of focus groups, plan inclusive activities in which all group members participate, and avoid or overcome problems. Through use of these approaches, adults can create more opportunities for children with mixed abilities to build meaningful friendships.

To nurture and maintain friendships between children with varying abilities, the key individuals in children's lives must work together.

A Appendix
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B Appendix
About the Dowling Friendship Program

❑ What was the program's purpose?

The purpose of the Dowling Friendship Program was to find ways to support, develop, and maintain friendships between elementary-age children with and without developmental disabilities, grades K-6, through participation in a variety of recreational activities.

❑ Where did the program take place?

The program was based at Dowling Urban Environmental Learning Center (Dowling School), a public elementary school in Minneapolis, Minnesota. (For more information about the school, see *Appendix C: About Dowling Urban Environmental Learning Center.*)

❑ How long did the program last?

After a year of planning, the Dowling Friendship Program began in September of 1990 and ended in June of 1992, lasting nearly two years. While the program has formally ended, collaboration between Dowling School and the University of Minnesota continues in order to support the maintenance of the children's relationships during the school day and in their neighborhoods.

❑ Who were the participants?

Five children with disabilities participated in the program. Each child with a disability engaged in an assortment of recreation activities with three to five nondisabled classmates, for a total of 23 nondisabled participants. The families who participated in the program represented diversity in race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family composition, and disability.

❑ In what recreation activities did the children participate?

Recreation activities included a variety of programs that took place at Dowling School, in families' homes, and in neighborhoods. Among the school-based activities were structured programs that generally met for one hour, once a week, for 10 weeks. These programs included Basketball, Computer Class, Indian Culture Class, Nature Class, Pottery, Art Activities, T-Shirt Painting, Theater, Kite-Making, and Plant Care, to name a few. Other school-based

The purpose of the Dowling Friendship Program was to find ways to support, develop, and maintain friendships between elementary-age children with and without developmental disabilities, grades K-6, through participation in a variety of recreational activities.

activities included ongoing programs that met once a week throughout the school year, such as Girl Scouts, Brownies, and 4-H. These programs took place as part of the school's after-school activity programming. Additionally, each child with a disability and his or her nondisabled friends met once a week throughout the school year in "lunch bunches," noon-hour programs led by University graduate assistants, where children ate their lunches together and took part in cooperative games and activities. Activities that took place in families' homes included birthday parties, slumber parties, games, and baking cookies, as well as other informal, spontaneous activities. Neighborhood involvement included participation in activities such as rollerskating, playing video games, eating pizza, and visiting neighborhood recreation centers.

❑ How were friendships promoted?

The following techniques and strategies, known as "Best Practices in Inclusive Recreation," were used to encourage friendships between the participants:

- Selection of programs based on children's preferences and abilities
- Environmental analyses of selected programs
- Cooperatively structured activities
- Staff training to meet individual needs
- Friendship training for all participants
- One-to-one assistance from trainer advocates
- Adaptations to meet individual needs
- Family focus groups
- Ongoing consultation with recreation leaders, parents, and teachers

❑ How was the program evaluated?

The program was evaluated in two primary ways. First, children and their parents were interviewed, one-to-one, by program staff. (Interview findings are included in *Chapter 1: What Friendships Mean.*) Second, families, school staff, and recreation professionals met in family focus groups to discuss the children's friendships and how to strengthen them. (For a fuller description of the family focus groups, see *Appendix F: Use of Family Focus Groups in the Dowling Friendship Program.* Findings from the family focus groups are presented in Chapter 3 as actions that families, school staff, and community recreation personnel can take to encourage friendships).

❑ How has the program been maintained?

As the Dowling Friendship Program drew to a close, efforts were made to ensure that, even though the program formally ended, the friendships between the children would continue. A parent task force was organized at Dowling School to oversee the maintenance of the children's relationships and their involvement in recreation activities together. Children continue to participate in lunch bunches through

support from university students. Families are organizing opportunities on their own initiative to enable the children to get together for home and neighborhood activities. Additionally, families, teachers, and recreation professionals continue to meet in family focus groups to find ways to support and maintain children's friendships. As the technical assistance provided by the program has phased out, parents, school personnel, and recreation professionals have become empowered to develop their own connections to support friendships between children with varying abilities.

C Appendix
About Dowling School

As students walk through the front doors of Dowling School, they are greeted by a large banner with a message of self-responsibility: "I AM THE SOLUTION."

As students walk through the front doors of the Dowling Urban Environmental Learning Center (Dowling School), they are greeted by a banner with a message of self-responsibility: "I AM THE SOLUTION." Whether solutions are needed to protect the environment or to teach students to respect, accept, and work with others, Dowling endeavors to create an atmosphere where children feel accepted, responsible, stimulated, challenged, and appreciated. In the words of the principal, Dr. Jeffrey Raison, "Those of us who have become part of the Dowling experience have learned to appreciate our environment and our most valued natural resource - the children."

Dowling is a public elementary school for students grades K-6 located in Minneapolis. It is a "magnet" school for environmental education. Parents choose to enroll their children at Dowling so they can receive instruction that emphasizes environmental themes and an appreciation of the natural world. Dowling's unusual curriculum heightens awareness about such issues as recycling, respecting the environment, and taking personal responsibility for protecting the earth.

As a complement to teaching environmental awareness, Dowling has a long history of commitment to providing education for students with varying abilities. The school is named for Michael Dowling, an educator and legislator with a disability, who advocated for and succeeded in passing the first bill to provide state aid for children with disabilities in 1919. Built in 1924, Dowling was originally a specialized, segregated school for students with severe, multiple disabilities. In 1987, Dowling became a magnet school and, ever since, students with and without disabilities have been educated together in classrooms.

In their efforts to provide inclusive education, Dowling fosters a supportive and respectful environment that focuses on individual strengths of students. Finding positive solutions to problems through creative, cooperative interactions is an integral part of the curriculum. To achieve these positive solutions and interactions, student expectations are outlined in seven areas: (1) respect, (2) responsibility, (3) cooperation, (4) achievement/effort, (5) self-control, (6) safety, and (7) enjoyment of learning. These expectations apply as much to academic achievement as they do to a student's personal and social development. Dowling believes that before academic skills can be taught, a student's sense of self-worth, confidence, and ability to relate respectfully to others must be addressed.

D Appendix

Interview with Dr. Jeffrey Raison, Principal of Dowling School

In this interview, Dr. Jeffrey Raison talks with Dowling Friendship Program Coordinator, Linda Heyne, about what parents want for their children, and how Dowling Urban Environmental Learning Center (Dowling School) attempts to respond to their wishes. Dr. Raison discusses how instruction in social skills can complement instruction in academics - how both work together to create responsible, educated individuals who feel good about themselves and care about others. He also addresses Dowling School's experiences moving from a specialized model of instruction for students with severe disabilities to an inclusive model of instruction for students with mixed abilities.

LH: What is the mission of the Dowling Urban Environmental Learning Center?

JR: The mission of the Dowling Urban Environmental Learning Center is to provide quality education to *all* students based on best practices and procedures. Dowling offers an interdisciplinary, thematic curriculum that emphasizes environmental themes with a special focus on the city. Students are encouraged to develop an awareness and appreciation of the environment, and to apply concepts developed in the classroom to a real world setting. Instruction in the use of technology and creative problem solving skills is an integral part of the program.

LH: How does friendship development between students with and without disabilities fit into Dowling's mission?

JR: A major focus of the school is to provide an inclusive community where students with severe disabilities learn along with regular education students in a supportive, respectful atmosphere. Individual strengths of all students are developed to encourage independence and to enhance their dignity. It is a major part of our mission statement to reach out to all students in regular *and* special education. The educational atmosphere at Dowling provides social and academic interaction and cooperative learning between students of all abilities. If you look at the symbol for our mission statement, which is a picture of a tree, the roots represent this educational atmosphere, one that provides social and academic learning through the creative interaction between students.

Individual strengths of all students are developed to encourage independence and to enhance their dignity.

LH: How do social skill development and academic skill development complement each other?

JR: Developing social and academic skills together is something that is very difficult to achieve. Some of the major problems confronting schools everywhere are due to the fact that one cannot work with children in academic areas without first addressing their social needs. In career research, people are finding that the major reason for job failure during the first year of employment is not a person's inability to learn the task - it is a person's inability to get along with others. Too often we have taught academic skills in isolation, as though children were people you did something to. Children are people who learn things. You can't pour academics into children - it's a much more interactive process.

I think the social aspect is very important. During my Bush Fellowship Educational Leaders Program, I asked parents about their largest hopes and dreams for their children. Let me read what parents told me is important to them: self-confidence, self-esteem, happiness, ability to love, knowing what they want, self-control, self-monitoring, responsibility, persistence, resistence to negative influences, respect for others, healthier relationships, independence, interdependence, realistic goals, acceptable behavior, sophistication about the world around them, gainful employement, and motivation. These dreams are not academic in nature. The largest hopes people have for their children have to do with social interaction. It is important to parents that children feel good about themselves. Parents want their children to be respectful of others: the school, the community, the earth. It is important that children can apply what they learn to the outside world, be motivated and challenged academically, and then go on to take charge of their own behavior and be responsible for their actions. Those are social kinds of interaction skills.

Some of the major problems confronting schools everywhere are due to the fact that one cannot work with children in academic areas without first addressing their social needs.

LH: When the Dowling Friendship Program began, you referred to the program as the "next step" in Dowling's efforts toward inclusion. What did you mean by the "next step?"

JR: I think to achieve inclusion, we need to move through different stages. Initially, inclusion is in the symbolic domain. You change your language, you alter how you do certain things, you look at what changes need to be made in your traditions and symbols. Then you begin to move beyond the inclusion of children as a symbolic gesture. You strip away classifications, you experiment with how to use personnel, you look at your resources and how to use them. You move away from the employee focus to the child focus. In order to go beyond that, though, you need to develop "depth." You need to take a closer look at the nature and *quality* of the interactions. Public Law 94-142 was not a clinical law, it was a civil rights law. Civil rights legislation can measure the *quantity* of interactions. It can measure symbolically if interactions are occurring, but it probably has less to do with the *quality* of interactions. When Public Law 94-142 was passed, researchers and special educators used it as a "sell-job" for the

latest hot issue in special education. I think we need less of the "sell-job," and more of a thoughtful study. We need to develop "depth" about questions like: What is the nature of those interactions? What is possible? What happens when two young children sit across the table from one another? Is it really possible to sustain a relationship between those two individuals? So, I do think we have entered the next phase of inclusion, where we are creating "depth" and finding out what makes it more likely that relationships and friendships will happen.

LH: I have heard you comment that you believe parents choose to enroll their children at Dowling not necessarily because it is a magnet school for environmental education, but because children with disabilities attend school here.

JR: Right. I would venture to say that, if we did a survey using a random sample, we would find that most parents are not selecting Dowling because it's a magnet school for environmental education. They select Dowling because of the nature of the social interactions that occur here, and because of the collaborative efforts that happen among teachers. The science emphasis plays some role, but I think parents are more interested in how interactions can do something for their children as human beings. They wish their children to become, in the Yiddish tradition, a *mensch*. They want their children to be able to come out of school as persons who know how to live in a world with different kinds of people. Also, I think parents look at the accommodations that are made for a child who has multiple kinds of problems, so that he or she will feel good about him or herself, and they think to themselves, "If they will do that for this child, what will they be able to do for an average child?" The message of "providing for the customer" has an effect not only on everyone who works here, but anyone who touches the school. The benefits wind up affecting people who don't need as much accommodation.

LH: How do you think Dowling has benefited from the Friendship Program? How have the families involved in the project benefited? How has the entire Dowling "community" benefited?

JR: A magnet school attracts many different communities, so there are sub-communities here. Any opportunity for connectedness between those communities is of value. The Dowling Friendship Program is one of those projects that opens up possibilities for this connectedness. Any program that opens up opportunities for families to connect with one another in a way that is warm and positive can only benefit the school. This is a program that does that. It is a program that allows parents to act - not as questioners at a press conference, which is often the relationship between parents and schools now - but as participants in the activity of relating to other human beings. It allows people who are isolated to connect with other families in ways that are warm and caring. It has an

Any program that opens up opportunities for families to connect with one another in a way that is warm and positive can only benefit the school. This is a program that does that.

impact on parents who feel disconnected from the mainstream, who feel disconnected from their life experience and their children's experiences. It can help them make individual decisions that will affect their child. Just as professionals first learned about normal development before we learned about disability concerns, it is important for families to have an opportunity to not only hear and think about how other families operate, but to really *see* how they operate. They can get some good benchmarks to shoot for. So, I think the program has had both intended and unintended benefits for the school community.

Also, parents in general often don't know how their children interact with other kids. It's a mystery to them. If you said to a parent, "If you could have an invisible camera and follow your child around and film their interactions all day, how much would you be willing to pay for that?" I think you would have some very high bidders. I think parents always want to get some sense of what the lives of their children are really like. They often only get glimpses of it. So, I don't think that it's totally unique to parents who have children with difficulties. I think the Friendship Program gives parents an opportunity to do what a lot of parents would like to be able to do.

LH: Do you have any words of encouragement for parents of children with disabilities about friendships for their children?

JR: Although I think they have some major challenges ahead of them, I would tell them not to get too discouraged. I think the words of encouragement are that there is a continuum on friendships for children who are challenged and children who are not. There is a core of parents who are challenged by the lack of friendships their children have, even though there is no physical or intellectual disability present. There are many parents who, on any given day in this school, would have some major questions about their child's ability to interact with other people.

We have been able to gather some basic knowledge and understanding about friendships between children with and without disabilities.... It will be important to be thoughtful in our efforts - not to get on a bandwagon - but to ask ourselves, "What does it really mean?"

LH: How would you like to see the Dowling Friendship Program develop in the future?

JR: We have been able to gather some basic knowledge and understanding about friendships between children with and without disabilities. It would be quite interesting to see if any of these concepts are helpful to students with other kinds of difficulties, such as students with emotional/behavioral disorders. It will be important to be thoughtful in our efforts - not to get on a bandwagon - but to ask ourselves, "What does it really mean?" We also need to know, "What *doesn't* it tell us?" We need to know the limitations as well as the possibilities for students. Parents need to know what is realistic to expect. We don't want parents to be misled and then bail out early. The program should not be speculative in its investment. It should be about incremental investing for the longterm. We should invest in a strong foundation for the longterm gain.

E Appendix

Interview with Ms. Micky Pearson, Integration Specialist, Dowling School

In this interview, Micky Pearson, Integration Specialist at Dowling Urban Environmental Learning Center (Dowling School) meets with Dowling Friendship Program Coordinator, Linda Heyne, to share her thoughts about what needs to take place at a school to support friendships between students with mixed abilities. Having worked at Dowling School for some 20 years, Ms. Pearson has been instrumental in facilitating the transition from segregated to inclusive services. She discusses the impact of the Dowling Friendship Program on the school, and the benefits for the children and families who participated in the program.

LH: From your perspective, having worked at Dowling for approximately 20 years, what major changes have you noticed over time?

MP: Twenty years ago teachers were struggling to provide normalization experiences for the 120 or so students with physical disabilities who were attending Dowling. Gradually, we began opening our program to nearby schools, inviting students in regular education programs to participate in classes with Dowling students on a weekly basis. These reverse mainstreaming efforts encouraged nearby schools to then open their doors to our students. For portions of the day, our students attended classes in regular schools, returning to Dowling for therapies and other special classes.

In 1987, when Dowling became a regular education site, we began our program as an Urban Environmental Learning Center. Staff put a great deal of energy into including students with special needs in regular education classrooms, in classes with specialists, during lunchtime, and on field-trips. We currently serve about 440 students, about 50 of whom receive specialized services. Because of our history and the accessibility of the site, a higher than average proportion of students with special needs attend Dowling.

Dowling has worked with the University of Minnesota on various projects, which have been a great help to our evolving program. We have been able to look at ways in which staff members can facilitate inclusion. We have been able to study the impact of inclusion on students in regular education programs. Now, with the Dowling Friendship Program, we have been able to learn how to promote friendships between students with and without disabilities in school and home settings.

...with the Dowling Friendship Program, we have been able to learn how to promote friendships between students with and without disabilities in school and home settings.

LH: As school liaison for the Dowling Friendship Program, you have done a great deal of work "behind the scenes" to facilitate the program. What has been your role as school liaison for the program?

MP: As a public school liaison for the Dowling Friendship Program, my role has been that of a "translator." I have been responsible for meshing the research goals of the project with the program goals of our school, translating the research goals into educational opportunities for the students. I have then needed to communicate, to parents and school staff, the advantages of those educational opportunities to show the mutual benefits to all the participants. I have also been a link between University students and Dowling staff, passing on pertinent information and keeping staff members updated as to the findings of the project.

As a school liaison, I pay careful attention to schedules. The cooperation of Dowling staff members in scheduling activities for the Friendship Program has been critical to the success of the program. Each student who receives special education services has a daily schedule of therapy and other related services. A paraprofessional who works with a student with a disability may work with other students as well, and is on a rather rigid daily schedule. Students in regular education may attend special groups or services during the week. The schedules of busy University students must be taken into consideration. In addition, the availability of space for small group activities is at a premium at the school. So, all these different schedules and constraints must be taken into account when planning Friendship Program activities.

In addition, public institutions have many guidelines for protecting the privacy of students when conducting research. All evaluation instruments must be submitted to the District's Department of Evaluation and Testing. Communication with parents of students involved in the program needs to be extensive. We need to receive permission for participation in each research program and for the use of each tool to evaluate the program.

When I think of how the children with disabilities have benefited [from the program], I think of changes I have noticed in individual children.

LH: How do you think the children with disabilities have benefited from participating in the Dowling Friendship Program?

MP: When I think of how the children with disabilities have benefited, I think of changes I have noticed in individual children. Before the Friendship Program, I saw one child becoming very different from her peers in social behavior. I think the fact that she is not different is due to the Friendship Program. We have wanted to keep her behavior consistent with that of her peers, and I think that is what has happened. Two other children had developed some bad habits and individual mannerisms that made them look much different from their peers. Those behaviors are really diminishing now, and I am sure part of that is due to the Friendship Program. One of those children now knows what turn-taking means, and is better able to sit and listen while others are talking. Those skills would not have

been worked on had it not been for the Friendship Program. Another child has become much more social, more able to interact with peers, less shy. I think that is because he has had the extra support that the program offered. Had it not been for that support, he might have had the tendency to back away and go into a shell, or depend upon a paraprofessional to do everything needed to help him make friends.

LH: How do you think the children without disabilities have benefited from the Dowling Friendship Program?

MP: In one of the friendship groups, the children without disabilities learned a great deal about how to include a child with mobility and movement difficulties into recreational activities. The students learned to be advocates for her - involving her in the activity and helping her to participate - and she learned to be an advocate for herself.

Another benefit of the Friendship Program has been for those regular education students who themselves have some minor difficulties academically or socially. The small group activities give them opportunities to have equal access to attention, to take part in special activities, and to experience supportive environments in which they can be successful. In this way, the integrated activities have been very important experiences for them. Also, for the nondisabled kids who seem to have it "all together," I think there has grown a noticeable awareness of students with special needs, and the development of compassion that would not have been there without the Friendship Program. Had those students not had supports to relate to students with special needs, they would have gone on their own way - and would have been very successful because they are successful students. It would be an unusual student, I think, who would take it upon him or herself to advocate for a student with a disability, without some support for doing that. The Friendship Program has given them an opportunity to add a new dimension to their lives. Over time, I think it will make a real difference for those children because they have had those supported experiences.

Another benefit of the Friendship Program has been for those regular education students who themselves have some minor difficulties academically or socially.

LH: What benefit have you seen for the school as a result of the program?

MP: The Friendship Program has had an impact on achieving two of our major, all-school goals. One of our goals involves "teaming" to meet the needs of all children in the classroom. We often think of the team as those professionals in the building who work with the children. The Friendship Program has given us a broader view of the team. That is, the team can be extended to include peers, parents of peers, and university students, all of whom add new dimensions to that goal. Our second major goal is to improve the climate of the school. This goal involves building self-esteem in students, helping them to take responsibility, and encouraging

students to participate in solving problems. Meeting and playing together in small groups facilitates the accomplishment of all those objectives.

All of our goals at Dowling are designed to increase the achievement of our students. Achievement encompasses many areas, and we believe that students who have friends and feel good about themselves will do better in school. We feel the Friendship Program has helped us to have a better understanding of how important friendship and self-esteem are to the development of academic skills.

LH: How have Dowling staff members responded to the Friendship Program?

MP: Comments from staff members indicate very real, observable benefits to students involved in the Friendship Program. Teachers say that students seem to be more accepting of differences. Some students involved in the program, who have minor special needs, are reaching out to children with disabilities and feeling good about being needed. It is good for these students to be helpers occasionally instead of always being recipients of help. Our school social worker believes the Friendship Program has been extremely valuable for developing positive self-esteem for some of the members of the groups.

Teachers have been highly favorable toward the small group interactions that have occurred as a result of the Friendship Program. At all age levels, it has been a real highlight for the children to be involved in small groups. Teachers have commented on how students especially enjoy getting together with their friends, where they have opportunities to talk and to be heard. The small groups provide much needed opportunities to learn from peers. One teacher in particular has felt that small group interactions have really made differences in the overall behavior of two of her students who have tendencies toward problem behaviors.

All of our goals at Dowling are designed to increase the achievement of our students. Achievement encompasses many areas, and we believe that students who have friends and feel good about themselves will do better in school.

LH: What would you say is the nature of the relationships between the children who participated in the program? Are the interactions reciprocal? Is the interest mutual?

MP: I sometimes catch myself having a stereotyped attitude about regular education students being with students with disabilities. At first, I think of the relationships as vertical relationships. I think our assumptions take over sometimes and we assume that students without disabilities who are friends with students with disabilities are there to help them. But when I see the children in groups, that's not what happens. It looks like they are reciprocal relationships. I'm often caught by surprise when they really are friendship situations.

LH: What shows you that the interactions are mutual?

MP: The casualness of the interactions. Somebody without a disability will say, "Come on!," and will say the names of two kids. One of the names is the name of a student with a disability, and the

other is the name of a nondisabled child. Or a group of children will be working at a table together. Everyone will be equally involved, and a child with a disability will be offering a suggestion, or doing something that is accepted by the other members of the group. It is as if: "Well, of course, that person would have something to contribute." There isn't a big deal made about it. When I see those things happening, I think, "Oh, that was just an ordinary thing. That's just like what people do when they interact." I do not think I am alone in having a different expectation there. I keep telling myself I should change my expectations because kids really are able to deal with other kids - better, I think, than adults are able to deal with adults who have differing abilities - especially when they are involved in an activity they are enjoying together.

LH: From your perspective, what are the primary obstacles to friendship development between the children?

MP: I think making arrangements for children to get together outside of school takes a great deal of effort - getting on the phone, communicating with one another. An extreme amount of care is needed to allow someone with a disability to do "spontaneous" things like get together with friends, or to meet a group at a park.

Another major barrier is when a child has language difficulties. The communication skills of most of the children with disabilities in the program are different from the communication skills of the nondisabled children. Language is so important with peers. Language is a major factor in people being able to relate to one another, whether they "speak the same language" or are at the same level of communication. I think nondisabled children are accustomed to hearing their peers speak in the same way they do. When they hear a peer with a disability say something and leave out half the words, they don't understand it. They usually won't put the effort into understanding the person unless there's someone there to help facilitate that understanding.

LH: How do you think friendships can be supported and maintained? What can Dowling do?

MP: It appears that the school needs to give a lot of support to providing programs in school and after school where kids can get together and pursue their friendships. We have certainly seen, from what your staff has done here, that programs that promote small group interactions have been key factors in developing friendships. The benefits have been that each child can be his or her own person. They have a chance to talk without having to wait for 22 others to take their turns before they can. They don't feel small in comparison to a large group of kids. In a small group, they have chances to have many more interactions.

Classroom assignments are also important. Each year of a child's life, they are with a particular group of kids in school, and from that group, they will usually draw their friends. Maybe

classroom assignments would not be so important if there were other avenues for kids to get together during the school day. Dynamics of classrooms have a great deal to do with friendship development.

I also think that if the school can provide a place for children and families to get together, the more opportunities they will have to get to know each other and determine whether or not they want to be friends. How do you know if you want to be friends until you have had an opportunity to get to know someone?

LH: What do you think families can do to encourage friendships?

MP: Issues such as children not being assigned to the same classroom or children not living in the same neighborhood can be offset by parental involvement. If parents are involved, and if parents are friends with the parents of their child's classmates, the children will have more opportunities to get together and become friends.

I think children have different kinds of friends. I think there are school friends, and there are kids who live in their neighborhoods. Visiting in each other's homes is a natural extension of the small group activities. If children are in an activity together, one can say to another child, "Come to my house," or "Let's go to a movie together." If the friendship only stays in the classroom, I don't think it will last in the long run, unless some additional connections are made. It would be great if parents would encourage home visits. Home visits really contribute to the maintenance of friendships.

LH: How would you like to see the Friendship Program develop in the future?

MP: I would like to see us really work to get children involved in small group activities, and to involve more families in family activities at school and in the neighborhood. If children and families have more opportunities to get together, then they will be able to take the next step and invite one another to community activities and into each other's homes.

F Appendix

Use of Family Focus Groups in the Dowling Friendship Program

In the Dowling Friendship Program, family focus groups were used to create connections between homes, school, and community in order to support and strengthen friendships between children with and without disabilities. Many of the focus group guidelines presented in the Chapter 4 (see page 27) were followed in facilitating the Dowling family focus groups. These guidelines were then tailored to suit the individual circumstances of the families who participated in the Dowling Friendship Program. In this appendix, we describe the strategies that were used to develop, organize, schedule, facilitate, and evaluate the family focus groups, as well as explain how the focus group process was adapted to meet the needs of Dowling School families.

❑ Family Focus Group Purpose and Questions

The purpose of the Dowling Friendship Program, and the family focus groups, was to discover answers to three central questions:

- What is the nature of relationships and friendships between children with and without disabilities?
- What obstacles prevent children with and without disabilities from making friends?
- How can friendships between children with and without disabilities be facilitated, supported, and maintained?

These questions arose from the particular situation at Dowling School, a situation similar to that experienced by many other communities across the country: the long history of segregation of students with disabilities, the recent physical inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms, the unanticipated lack of social interaction and friendships that occurred between students with and without disabilities, the continued isolation experienced by students with disabilities, and the lack of opportunities available to nondisabled students to grow in awareness of the abilities and contributions of students labeled as "different." In talking with Dowling School parents, children, and school staff members who were concerned about the lack of friendships between children with and without disabilities, these three fundamental questions took shape. Like stems of vines that sprouted new shoots, these questions gave rise to other secondary questions. For example, in attempting to

In the Dowling Friendship Program, family focus groups were used to create connections between homes, school, and community in order to support and strengthen friendships between children with and without disabilities.

understand the nature of relationships and friendships between children with and without disabilities, these questions arose:

- How do children define "friendship"?
- How do children make friends?
- Are interactions between children with and without disabilities essentially vertical (teacher-student, parent-child) or horizontal (peer-peer, mutual, reciprocal) in nature?
- How are friendships between children with and without disabilities similar to or different from friendships between nondisabled children?
- What are the dynamics of childhood friendships?
- How do friendships change over time?
- What are realistic expectations regarding friendships between children with varying abilities?

Regarding the obstacles to friendship development, the questions that were generated included:

- How can obstacles be identified?
- What circumstances or conditions caused the obstacles?
- What are the most common obstacles?
- How do the obstacles limit friendship development?
- How can the obstacles be alleviated?
- Who are the key players and what roles can they play to remove obstacles to friendships?

Questions that addressed how friendships can be facilitated, supported, and maintained included:

True to the typical focus group format, the questions asked were "how" or "what" questions, resulting in many in-depth discussions about friendships.

- What can parents and families do to support friendships?
- What role can schools (teachers, social workers, after-school activity coordinators) play in promoting positive social interactions and friendship development between children?
- What community resources are available to support friendships?
- How can important people in a child's life work together to support friendships for the child across home, school, and community settings?

These questions served as the basis for discussions over the two years the family focus groups met. True to the typical focus group format, the questions asked were "how" or "what" questions, resulting in many in-depth discussions about friendships. The outcomes of those discussions are included throughout Chapter 3 of this manual, *How to Encourage Friendships*. Here we will continue to explore the mechanics of how those results were achieved.

❑ Recruitment of Participants

Five family focus groups participated in the Dowling Friendship Program. Each family focus group included a child with a disability and his or her family members, two to four nondisabled classmates and their family members, school staff (such as an inclusion specialist, classroom teacher, and social worker), recreation staff (program leaders), and program staff.

To recruit children and families, letters of invitation were sent to the parents of the 50 Dowling School students who received special education services. Five families responded, the exact number being sought given the level of attention children and families would be given, the length of time of the program, and the staff resources available to the project. Classmates without disabilities were then identified as potential program participants, and letters were sent to their parents inviting them to participate in the program and the family focus groups. In the letters of invitation, the purpose of the program was stated and the expectations for participation (attendance at family focus groups and intent to participate for the duration of the program) were explained. School, recreation, and University of Minnesota staff were involved in the family focus groups as appropriate to the needs and preferences of each group.

Heterogeneous, rather than homogeneous, groups of individuals are typically sought for focus groups in order to gather information from a range of opinions and experiences. Dowling School family focus groups involved families that represented a spectrum of family member compositions, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and children's grades and ages. To complement this diversity, family focus group participants had a common, unifying interest (also a characteristic of focus groups): friendship development between children with and without disabilities.

❑ Scheduling

Dowling School family focus groups involved families that represented a spectrum of family member compositions, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and children's grades and ages.

While the typical focus group meets only once, Dowling School family focus groups gathered for a series of meetings over a two-year period. Originally conceived as a series of regularly scheduled, monthly meetings, it was soon discovered that such a rigid schedule was not compatible with families' busy lifestyles. Consequently, meetings were arranged far in advance, families' schedules were coordinated so that as many group members as possible could attend, and meetings were held at convenient times and at nearby locations. Sometimes, families were available only over the dinner hour, so they met for potluck suppers. On the average, each family focus group met once every three months.

As a general rule, only one-half to one-third of the participants recruited for a focus group will actually be able to attend. Because family focus group members were handpicked and ongoing input was desired from all participants, project staff needed to reach out to families in an individual and personal way to encourage families to

attend. In setting up meetings, phone calls were made to determine when families would be able to attend meetings and to establish dates and places for meetings. Flyers with information about the particulars of meetings and agendas were developed and mailed to families. Additionally, follow-up, reminder phone calls were made to the families by program staff the day before each meeting.

Problems in communication arose when families had no home telephones. Written correspondence, the alternative avenue of communication that was used, was usually unproductive due to the lag time involved and the possibility that correspondence could be lost, misplaced, or simply not read. At times, input regarding scheduling was not retrieved due to these problems. All in all, the difficulties in scheduling were overcome by the commitment of families to friendship development for their children and the perseverance of project staff to schedule meetings.

❑ Locations

At the beginning of the Dowling Friendship Program, family focus groups met at the school, a common point of reference for all group members. Later, as group members became more familiar with each other, suggestions were made to meet at neighborhood recreation centers, and invitations were extended to gather in people's homes.

The advantages of meeting at community recreation centers were that families who previously had no exposure to these facilities could explore them, learn about recreation programs for their children, and peruse the facilities for programmatic and architectural accessibility. Meeting in families' homes was also beneficial. The atmosphere was informal and warm, promoting greater self-disclosure and ease among group members. Families could connect personally and assess whether and how relationships between family members might develop. When the focus group was held at the home of a child with a disability, a parent of a nondisabled child could observe the child with a disability on his or her own "turf," watch how the child interacted with others and the environment, and learn from the example of the child's parent how to meet the child's needs. Through this informal education, a parent of a nondisabled child could rehearse in his or her mind the considerations and practical logistics of inviting the child with a disability for a home visit or to a community event. In all cases, wherever family focus groups met, the selection of sites was decided collectively by the focus group participants themselves.

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❑ Format of Meetings

The format of the family focus groups was originally intended to be highly structured and task-oriented, where the primary objective would be to answer the questions related to friendship development. In talking with families, however, we soon learned that, in order for

families to work together, they first needed to know each other. If families were to want to attend meetings, given the diverse activities and responsibilities competing for their attention, meetings would need to be interesting, enjoyable, personally beneficial - more than just work. With this insight, a more realistic and balanced approach was used to make meetings as much like a social gathering as possible, that is, friendly, personable, festive, and fun. The purposeful tasks of addressing questions were introduced as people were ready to tackle them. As the family focus group process evolved, two primary objectives unfolded: first, for families to become acquainted and, second, for group members to work together to discuss questions about friendship.

In determining the format of get-togethers, we also needed to consider if and how well the families in each group knew each other. That is, in some groups, only two or three parents knew each other; in other groups, none of the parents knew each other; and in one group, families lived in the same neighborhood and parents had already been initiating informal connections between the children for years. Depending on the group's degree of connectedness, the flavor of meetings varied. If families were well-connected, group members were more able to focus on the discussion; if families were not well-connected, the tone of the meeting would be more social in nature.

Given the considerations of family connectedness and maintaining a social atmosphere, meetings generally followed the format described below, with accommodations made for each group as necessary. It should be restated that while this format worked well for the family focus groups at Dowling School, the structure of focus groups for other communities will need to be individually planned based on the needs of those communities.

- **Informal Social Time.** The first 15 to 20 minutes of a family focus group was spent engaged in informal social interactions. Besides allowing a grace period for latecomers, this social time provided an opportunity for group members to meet each other, engage in light conversation, share information, and enjoy refreshments (cookies, crackers, fruit, beverages). Until the group members knew each other by name, name tags were provided. This informal social time established an air of hospitality and warmth, enabling group members to relax and make connections with other members in their group.

- **Welcome and Introductory Remarks.** After the expected group members arrived and participants had opportunities to greet each other, the moderator welcomed everyone, introduced him or herself, and invited the group members to briefly introduce themselves. In these short self-introductions, group members usually stated their names and shared information about themselves, such as why they wanted to participate in the program or one of their favorite recreational activities. (As people became acquainted over time, these self-introductions were no longer necessary.) After introductions, the moderator reviewed the meeting's agenda. The moderator was

Focus Group Format

- ❑ **Informal Social Time**
- ❑ **Welcome and Introductory Remarks**
- ❑ **Program Update**
- ❑ **Children Participate in Cooperative Activities While Parents Discuss Questions**
- ❑ **Family Recreation Activity and Social Time**

typically a project staff member from the University of Minnesota. This role could just as easily be filled by a parent, teacher, recreation program leader, school social worker, inclusion facilitator, or any other interested person from an agency or the community. The welcome and introductory comments required between 5 and 10 minutes.

- **Program Update.** For the next 10 to 15 minutes, an update of the Dowling Friendship Program, particularly as it related to the group members who were present, was provided. This update generally included information about the children's participation in recreation activities and any other general program announcements. Because children were present, it was important to design updates that would hold the children's attention and to limit the length of the presentations so the children would not grow restless. To accomplish this, updates: (1) focused on the involvement of the children themselves in activities, (2) included slides and photographs of the children interacting socially and playing together, (3) displayed "products," such as art or craft projects, that the children had made, and (4) moved along at a brisk clip. At the end of the update, participants were invited to share stories or ask questions about the material presented. The moderator usually provided the update, although reports were also shared by parents, recreation program leaders, and classroom teachers.

- **Children Participate in Cooperative Activities While Parents Discuss Friendship Questions.** After the update, the children were escorted to a separate room - a gym, multi-purpose room, or family room - to play together in cooperative activities (for a description of cooperatively structured activities, see Chapter 4, Guideline 1 of *Guidelines for Facilitating Friendships*, page 35). These activities included such games as cooperative volleyball, parachute games, cookie decorating, and various "New Games," to name a few. Project staff, school staff, and volunteers were responsible for supervising and leading the children's activities.

  While children participated in activities, parents, school staff, and recreation staff discussed the issues regarding friendships for the children. Depending on group dynamics, the discussions varied from being led, question-by-question, by the moderator to resembling a group conversation. Although the moderator was prepared with specific questions for discussion, the format was kept flexible so that group members felt free to introduce and discuss new information, concerns, or questions. Discussions usually lasted about 30 minutes. At the end of a discussion, group members were asked to complete a one-page evaluation form. This form asked questions about participants' expectations, how well those expectations were met, the effectiveness of the family focus group, and friendship development for the children.

- **Family Recreation Activity and Social Time.** After the focus group discussion was brought to a close, parents and other group members had an option to join the children in a cooperative activity

The structure of focus groups for other communities will need to be individually planned based on the needs of those communities.

appropriate for all ages - such as volleyball, a parachute game, or a craft activity - and/or to visit informally with the other focus group participants. During this time, group members had opportunities to continue to become acquainted, share comments and experiences, exchange phone numbers and addresses, or make plans for the next get-together.

❑ Equipment

To facilitate the group discussion, materials such as chalk, chalkboards, flip charts, and markers were often used. Notepaper was used by an assistant moderator (program staff) to record key points of the discussions. Name tags were provided until the participants knew each other by name. Play materials (balls, volleyball net, art supplies), generally provided by the school or community recreation facilities, were also needed for the children's activities. Additionally, audiorecorders were used to tape focus group discussions.

❑ All-Family Focus Groups

At the beginning and end of the Dowling Friendship Program, each of the five family focus groups were brought together for an "All-Family Focus Group." The purposes of these meetings were to provide introductory or closure information about the program as appropriate, to bring together a larger group of people with the common interest of friendship development to share experiences, to strengthen the ties between group members, to thank the group members for participating, and to "showcase" the children's participation in the program.

❑ Evaluation

The family focus groups were evaluated in several ways. The comments and ratings gathered on the evaluation forms were taken into consideration. The transcriptions of the discussions were reviewed regarding the general ambience of the meetings, common concerns or themes of participants, new information that emerged, and any shifts in the discussion that occurred during the meeting. The following observations were noted: how interested participants appeared to be in the discussion, the quality of interactions between participants, the length of time participants spent engaged in interactions, whether or not group members expressed interest in meeting outside the focus groups (exchanged phone numbers or addresses, extended invitations), and how long participants lingered beyond the "formal" ending time of the meeting.

❑ Benefits

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some of the problems impeding friendship development between children with and without disabilities. These anticipated advantages did, in fact, occur. There were also several other unforeseen benefits that emerged from the family focus groups:

- New avenues for regular communication were established between school personnel and families.
- Parents could observe their children with and without disabilities interacting and playing together, an event that most parents had previously had no opportunity to experience.
- Parents of children with disabilities could see, first-hand, their sons and daughters successfully interacting with other children. For those parents who had doubts if their children could ever have friends, observing these interactions gave them hope that friendships were possible for their children. This visible proof of social interaction and friendships gave these parents higher expectations for friendship development for their children.
- The focus group discussions served as an eye-opening, educational experience for many of the parents of nondisabled children as they listened to the personal stories of parents of children with disabilities, and gained a greater understanding and appreciation for the joys and struggles those families experienced.
- The recognition the nondisabled children received for their involvement in the Dowling Friendship Program reinforced their commitments to the relationships. After focus groups took place, the nondisabled children appeared more interactive, involved, and easy-going in their relationships.
- Parents of nondisabled children experienced a sense of pride that their children had volunteered to participate in the program.
- During all-family focus groups, parents of children with disabilities felt less alone in their endeavors to help their children make friends because they were able to share with others in similar situations.

...family focus groups in the Dowling Friendship Program proved to be an effective means of building home-school-community connections to promote friendships between children with and without disabilities.

❑ Summary

In summary, family focus groups in the Dowling Friendship Program proved to be an effective means of building home-school-community connections to promote friendships between children with and without disabilities. They opened lines of communication, helped group members understand each other's perspectives, provided a format for discussing issues and solving problems, and gave group members opportunities to develop relationships with each other. The family focus group described here met the needs and answered the questions of the people concerned about friendships between children with varying abilities in the Dowling community. Other communities who wish to use the family focus group process will need to evaluate how responsive this process will be to their situations, and to make appropriate adaptations as necessary.

G Appendix

Indicators of Quality in Integrated Community Recreation

What constitutes a quality integrated recreation program for a person with a disability? Are there signs for which parents, school personnel, and community recreation staff can look? Are there traits that community recreation providers can strive to include in their programs? The following is a list of indicators of quality in community recreation services. It focuses primarily on the provider's level of commitment to social inclusion and friendship development.

❑ Administration

- Statement of mission and agency's philosophy reflect belief in inclusion.
- Staff hiring criteria give credit for education and/or experience reflecting inclusion.
- Adherence to laws and legislation regarding serving persons with disabilities in regular recreation programs.
- Staff training emphasizes continuing education in areas such as techniques in inclusion, and use of on-site consultants.
- Documentation of inclusive services and interventions is provided and the effects on participants are emphasized.

❑ Nature of Program

- Features inclusive programs, but could provide segregated-integrated programs, too (allows for choice).
- Provides flexible programs that allow for ongoing modifications and adaptations (allows for partial participation, if needed).
- Program goals reflect an inclusion emphasis, for example through cooperative activities.

❑ Activities

- Activities are chronologically age-appropriate, functional, and have lifelong learning potential.
- Activities occur in many places, at many times.
- Activities allow for personal challenge and participant choice.

What constitutes a quality integrated recreation program for a person with a disability? Are there signs for which parents, school staff, and community recreation staff can look?

❑ Environmental/Logistical Considerations

- Program is physically accessible and easily modifiable.
- Activities are offered at convenient and appropriate times for participants.
- Cost is reasonable and sponsorships/scholarships are available.

❑ Techniques and Methods

- Ongoing assessment is conducted of participants' recreation needs, preferences, abilities, relationships, and enjoyment levels.
- Parent and consumer involvement is included in all assessments.
- Inclusion techniques, such as cooperative learning, environmental analysis, partial participation, and companionship training are utilized regularly.
- Ongoing program evaluation is conducted to make adaptations as needed.
- Appropriate involvement of unpaid (volunteer) or paid partners is available.

[This list] focuses primarily on the provider's level of commitment to social inclusion and friendship development.

Note: The Indicators of Quality in Integrated Community Recreation are taken from Rynders, J. & Schleien, S. (1991). Together successfully: Creating recreational and educational programs that integrate people with and without disabilities. Arlington, TX: The Association for Retarded Citizens - United States, National 4-H, and the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota.

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